DIGGLE • PISA • ANGULO

THE EXPANSE™

DRAGON TOOTH

VOLUME TWO

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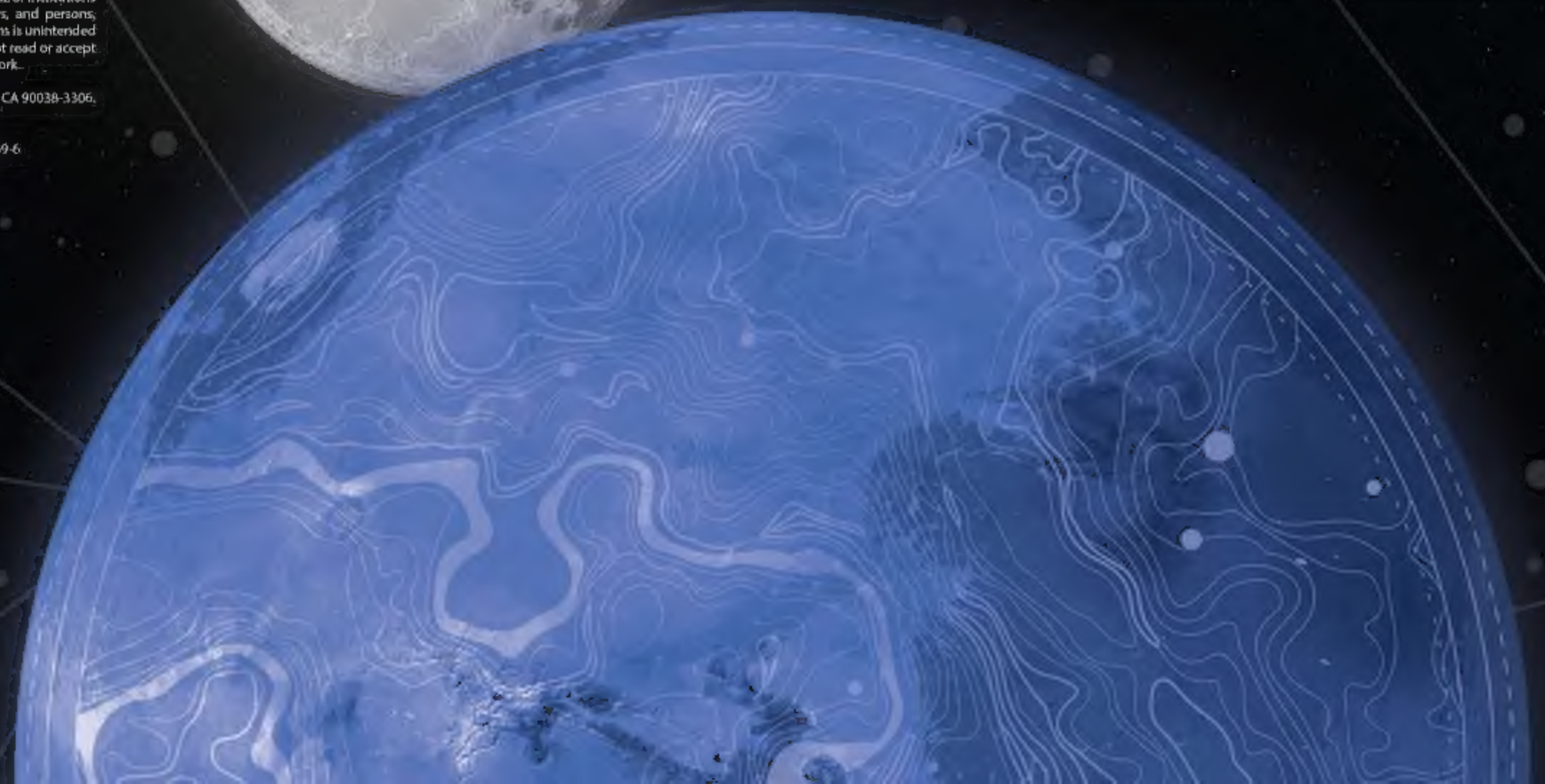


CHAPTER FIVE

"ON HEMMED-IN GROUND, RESORT TO STRATAGEM."
- SUN TZU, THE ART OF WAR

THE ROCINANTE
10 YEARS LATER

ALL CREW, REPORT TO THE GALLEY.

THIS IS NOT A DRILL!

SOMETHIN' SMELLS GOOD IN HERE.

WHICH IS...WEIRD.

BACK ON EARTH, I ALWAYS LOVED PLANNING A BIG THANKSGIVING DINNER...

AND *THIS*, MY FRIENDS, IS A ***REAL LIVE TURKEY!***

NOT ANYMORE.

MEDINA HAS TURKEYS NOW. I EVEN SAW *COWS* LAST TIME. I GUESS ALL THAT MORMON FRONTIERSMAN ART WENT TO THEIR HEADS.

BESIDES, IT'S A SPECIAL DAY FOR ME.

SHIT, IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY...?

KINDA. ANNIVERSARY OF ME OFFICIALLY JOINING THE CREW.

I DON'T USUALLY MAKE A BIG DEAL OF IT, BUT...IT IS, FOR ME. ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

NOT EVERYONE GETS A SECOND CHANCE. OR *DESERVES* ONE. SO I JUST WANTED TO SAY--

COOL.

THANK YOU.

WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT, RIGHT HERE, IS A WHOLE *MESS* OF SECOND CHANCES.

I WOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE IF I HADN'T PUNCHED MY COMMANDER IN THE FACE. OR TRIED TO, ANYWAY...

SO I GUESS I'M THANKFUL FOR ALL OF YOU. THAT, AND BEING LOUSY AT BOXING.

AMATEUR. I MADE SURE TO PUT MY C.O. IN URGENT CARE BEFORE I DEFECTED—

SHIT, ARE THESE REAL POTATOES?!

I'VE BURNED THROUGH SO MANY SECOND CHANCES, I'VE LOST TRACK. BUT IT'S GOOD TO KNOW YOU'VE ALL GOT MY BACK.

HOW ABOUT YOU, AMOS? ANY REGRETS?

YEP.

ANYTHING YOU WANT TO SHARE?

NOPE.

SO WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?

TURKEY'S GOOD.

FOSHO, REAL MEAT IS *HEAVY*.

I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE TERM "TURKEY COMA" UNTIL NOW...

A LONG-VENERATED EARTH TRADITION.

I SAW DRUMMER'S GIVING A SPEECH AT THE *Y GUE* MEMORIAL. MAYBE WE SHOULD RECORD SOMETHING?

I MEAN, YOU ***WERE*** THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE TRANSPORT UNION.

FOR LIKE, THIRTY SECONDS.

BESIDES, THE LAST THING ANYONE WANTS TO HEAR IS ANOTHER SPEECH FROM JAMES HOLDEN.

NO, THIS IS FINE. NICE EASY JOB, BABYSITTING A SCIENCE PROJECT.

GOOD FOOD, GENTLE BURN, NOBODY'S TRYING TO KILL US...

YOU... ARE GETTING *COMPLACENT* IN YOUR OLD AGE.

I'LL TAKE IT.

UNTIL YOU GET BORED, AND GO RACING OFF TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE AGAIN.

NAH. THOSE DAYS ARE BEHIND ME. THAT WAS SOME OTHER GUY.

WITH TIGHTER ABS.

HEY.

FANCY A BIT OF A WORKOUT...?

GOD, YES.

MEDINA STATION
IN THE RING SPACE

THIS IS **MEDINA TRAFFIC CONTROL.**

PAWNSHOP MARIMBA, *YOU ARE GO FOR TRANSIT TO BARA GAON SYSTEM.*

VIRGINIA HALL, *TARIFF PAYMENT HAS NOW CLEARED.*

TRAVERSAL APPROVED, AUBERON TO NOVA PUCARA.

LONE STAR, *YOU ARE* **OVERLADEN.** *BE ADVISED, YOUR TRANSIT PERMIT TO FREEHOLD IS HEREBY* **REVOKED.**

PLEASE POWER DOWN YOUR REACTOR AND STAND BY FOR INSPECTION.

YOU RECKON US FREEHOLDERS ANSWER TO UNION LACKEYS? YOU RECKON **WRONG,** *SON.*

YOU CAN ANSWER TO UNION LACKEYS OR UNION RAILGUNS.

YOUR CALL, KOPENG.

...POWERING DOWN.

MONZCARRO, YOU ARE A GO FOR RING GATE TRANSIT FROM SOL SYSTEM.

MAINTAIN DESIGNATED FLIGHT PATH AND DECELERATION BURN.

THIS HAD BETTER BE URGENT I HAVE A SPEECH TO PREPARE

YOUR *SENTINEL.*

IT'S HERE

MAKE SURE THEY COME TO A FULL STOP BEFORE DEPLOYING.

I DON'T WANT THAT HAULER WITHIN TEN THOUSAND KLICKS OF THE EXCLUSION ZONE

NO HARM, *BOSMANG.* ***ARROKOTH COLLECTIVE*** KNOW WHAT THEY DOING.

LET'S HOPE SO

COMM RELAY STATION
SOL RING

WELCOME TO CRS-1, ROCINANTE!

WE'VE LAID OUT THE RED CARPET FOR YOU AT CARGO LOCK FIVE

DR. ELVI OKOYE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, IASB

MY GOODNESS, LOOK AT YOU BOTH! YOU HAVEN'T AGED A DAY!

BOBBIE DRAPER. GOOD TO MEET YOU, DOCTOR

ELVI, PLEASE

I HEARD ABOUT *ILUS.* SOUNDS LIKE I MISSED OUT ON SOME CRAZY SH

UH, STUFF

YOU'RE VERY KIND

I JUST WISH IT WAS TRUE

I'D CALL THAT AN ACCURATE SUMMARY THOUGH WE HAVE OUR FAIR SHARE OF CRAZY HERE, TOO.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, THIS IS *FAYEZ SARKIS,* OUR MATERIALS SPECIALIST—AND MY HUSBAND

YOU GUYS GOT MARRIED?

HEY, CONGRATS!

WHAT CAN I SAY, IT WAS A LONG JOURNEY BACK FROM ILLUS ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, AND, WELL...

ELVI DECIDED TO MAKE ME HER PERSONAL RESEARCH SUBJECT

ONE I'M SURE I'LL NEVER GET TO THE BOTTOM OF

I'M SORRY *DOCTOR CHERNIV* ISN'T HERE TO GREET YOU IN PERSON.

IRONICALLY, HIS UNCANNY KNACK FOR VISUALIZING HIGHER-DIMENSIONAL SPACETIME MANIFOLDS DOES LITTLE TO IMPROVE HIS TIMEKEEPING...

I'M SURE HE HAS MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO BE DOING.

MOST OF OUR EQUIPMENT IS PACKED UP AND READY TO GO.

WE DO STILL HAVE A FEW SENSORS OUT ON THE RING STRUCTURE, WHICH WE'LL HAVE TO RETRIEVE MANUALLY.

WE'D USE DRONES, BUT GATE INTERFERENCE TENDS TO MAKE THEM A LITTLE SQUIRRELLY

WE CAN HELP WITH THAT

GREAT, THANK YOU. I'LL WALK YOU THROUGH IT

THAT'S WHAT YOUR PROJECT IS ALL ABOUT, THOUGH, RIGHT? BETTER COMMS THROUGH THE RINGS?

IT'S WHAT THESE RELAY STATIONS WERE BUILT FOR, CERTAINLY — AND REALLY, IT'S ALL ANYONE SEEMS TO CARE ABOUT.

BUT OUR GROUP, THE *LASG*—WE'RE TRYING TO DIG A LITTLE DEEPER.

WE'RE ALL JUST USING THE RINGS.

YOU WANT TO *UNDERSTAND* THEM

HONESTLY, I DOUBT WE'LL EVER GET THERE IN MY LIFETIME BUT YES

OR AT LEAST, DEVELOP A MORE GRANULAR PREDICTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INHERENT RISK FACTORS

SO WE DON'T ALL GET DEVOURED BY DARK GODS FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION.

THAT'S ACTUALLY THE TITLE OF MY NEXT PAPER.

THEN SORRY, BUT WHY LEAVE?

WHY ARE WE TRANSFERRING YOU TO SOME OLD *ASTEROID SPOTTER* THEY'VE HAULED UP THE WELL?

BECAUSE RESEARCH COSTS MONEY

THE TRANSPORT UNION ISN'T CRAZY ABOUT US POKING AROUND WITH THE SOL RING.

I THINK THEY'RE WORRIED WE'LL *BREAK* IT.

WE GOT THIS FAR WITH THE PROMISE OF IMPROVED INTER-SYSTEM COMMUNICATIONS.

BUT CONTINGENT ON THAT IS THE *SENTINEL*.

ITS SENSORS ARE OUTDATED--THE *FREE NAVY* PROVED THAT--BUT STILL BETTER AT SCALE THAN ANYTHING WE HAVE OUT HERE

AND TO CAPTURE AN ACCURATE STEADY-STATE PROFILE.

YOU NEED A RING GATE WITH NO SHIPS PASSING THROUGH IT

RIGHT

SOMETHING TELLS ME THE ONE THEY PICKED WASN'T EXACTLY AT RANDOM

INDEED *LACONIA*.

DOCTOR CHERNIV, PLEASE REPORT TO OPERATIONS.

PAGING DOCTOR CHERNIV.

AMOS! HOW'S THE HAND?

GREW BACK GOOD AS NEW. I WAS HOPIN' FOR SOME EXTRA FINGERS, BUT *NAH.*

ME AN' PEACHES ARE HEADIN' OUT TO GRAB THOSE SENSORS IN A FEW. RIGHT NOW I'M HERE FOR A LASER?

THROUGH HERE WE'VE BEEN STUDYING PHOTON ENTANGLEMENT LATENCY ACROSS THE EVENT HORIZON.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.

FUCK.

I MUSTA BEEN THROUGH THE RING LIKE A HUNDRED TIMES NOW. STILL FREAKS ME OUT.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I STUDIED EXOBIOLOGY BACK WHEN THE FIELD WAS PURELY HYPOTHETICAL. AND I'VE SPENT THE LAST DECADE EXPLORING ACTUAL ALIEN ECOSYSTEMS AND ARTIFACTS.

STILL FREAKS *ME* OUT, TOO

SO IS THAT LIKE, AN *A-M/F-M* THING?

RADIO MODULATION...?

NO. I MEAN LIKE THERE'S *ACTUAL MACHINES*, AN' THERE'S *FUCKIN' MAGIC.*

SEE, I'M BASICALLY AN A-M GUY. THE *ROC'S* AN ACTUAL MACHINE BUT *THIS...?*

FUCKING MAGIC.

Y KNOW, THAT'S ACTUALLY RATHER APT

HOLDEN SAYS THERE'S SOMETHIN' IN THERE SOMETHIN' THAT WANTS US DEAD

YOU SAW 'EM TOO, RIGHT, ON THE BUS? DOESN'T THAT SCARE YOU?

I'M A SCIENTIST WE ONLY FEAR WHAT WE DON'T UNDER-STAND.

SO. YES.

IT SCARES ME VERY DEEPLY

RIGHT NOW, WE MAY WELL BE STANDING IN A *SEPARATE UNIVERSE* FROM OUR OWN—EXCEPT FOR MY *RIGHT HAND*, WHICH IS IN SOL *SYSTEM*.

BUT I CAN STILL *FEEL* IT. I'M WIGGLING MY FINGERS!

THEY BETTER HAVE A TRANSIT PERMIT OR THE UNION'S GONNA BE PISSED

YOU WORK WITH A FUSION REACTOR, SO YOU UNDERSTAND MASS-ENERGY EQUIVALENCE

PERHAPS THE BARYONIC MATTER OF MY HAND IS BEING CONVERTED TO ENERGY AND PHYSICALLY RECONSTITUTED ELSEWHERE

SEAMLESS, NONLOCAL, MACROSCOPIC ENTANGLEMENT

BUT THE AMOUNT OF ENERGY REQUIRED TO DO THAT, LET ALONE KEEP *ANY* OF THESE GATES OPEN AND STABLE, WOULD BE *INCALCULABLE*, LITERALLY

I KNOW, BECAUSE WE'VE TRIED TO CALCULATE IT

WAIT YOU'RE SAYIN' EVERY TIME WE GO THROUGH ONE OF THESE THINGS...

...IT AIN'T THE SAME *US* THAT COMES OUT THE OTHER SIDE?

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO FIND OUT. BUT WOULD IT REALLY BE SO STRANGE?

THE MOLECULES THAT CONSTITUTE OUR BODIES ARE ENDLESSLY EXCHANGED, REPLENISHED

THAT'S JUST *LIFE.*

THINK BACK TO WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE BOY.

NOT A SINGLE ATOM, THAT WAS A PART OF YOU THEN, IS A PART OF YOU NOW

GOOD

NEUTRINOS ARE NOTORIOUSLY TRICKY TO DETECT, BUT WE'RE SEEING A HEIGHTENED VIRTUAL PARTICLE BACKGROUND NEAR THE- -

UH-HUH.

SO OF COURSE, THAT RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF NEUTRINO-ANTINEUTRINO ANNIH...ATIONS GENERATING *NEW* PARTICLES WE *CAN* DETECT

HENCE THE *ZEBEDEE'S.*

THE WHAT?

Z-BOSON DETECTORS.

BY SPACING THEM EQUIDISTANTLY AROUND THE RING STRUCTURE, WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO-

COOL. GOT IT

YOU'LL GET SOME INTERFERENCE FROM THE GATE. SO TRY TO STAY IN VISUAL AND USE HAND SIGNALS IF NECESSARY

ALSO. THE RING STRUCTURE IS LARGELY NON-FERROUS. SO I'M AFRAID YOUR MAG-BOOTS WON'T BE EFFECTIVE

SO WHAT *IS* IT MADE OF? *FROST*

OH MAN, DON'T GET ME STARTED I COULD WRITE A BOOK ON IT!

ACTUALLY, I *DID* WRITE A BOOK ON IT.

BUT YEAH, MOST OF THE RAW MATERIAL CAME FROM EROS AND VENUS. BUILT OUT FROM THE INITIAL FRAMEWORK OF STABLE REPLICATORS, OF COURSE

STABLE REPLICATORS YOU MEAN PEOPLE

ARE THEY STILL *IN* THERE. ?

LIKE, HOLDEN SAID HE TALKED TO THIS *MILLER* GUY, EVEN AFTER... Y'KNOW

SO DID ELVI. SHE STILL HAS NIGHTMARES ABOUT IT

BUT NO, IT WASN'T MILLER AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL. THAT WAS SOMETHING MORE LIKE A *USER INTERFACE.*

ALRIGHT, WE'RE COMIN' UP ON YOUR FIRST SENSOR.

I'M GETTING SOME INTERFERENCE HERE GIMME A SECOND TO RESET COMMS.

JULIE ?

ALRIGHT, ONCE THEY'RE DONE OUT THERE WE'RE PRETTY MUCH SQUARED AWAY

ALL WE NEED NOW ARE THE SCIENCE GEEKS. APPARENTLY THEY'RE STILL TRYING TO MUSTER THIS *CHERNIV* GUY

BOBBIE, DID YOU NOTICE ANY ISSUES WITH THE DRIVE ON THE WAY HERE?

NOPE. WHY, IS THERE A PROBLEM?

NOT SURE YET

I'M RUNNING MY USUAL PRE-FLIGHTS, AND THERE'S THIS WEIRD LITTLE SNAG IN THE COIL

ROC! DOESN'T SEEM WORRIED

RING INTERFERENCE, MAYBE?

HOPEFULLY IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING.

TRUST YOUR GUT

AMOS, ARE YOU STILL SUITED UP?

JUST ABOUT WHAT'S UP?

CAN YOU TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT OUR DRIVE CONE? I'M READING AN E-M SPIKE ON THE EXHAUST COIL.

IT'S PRETTY MINOR. I'D SEND OUT A DRONE, BUT

ON IT. GIMME A FEW MINUTES TO GET DOWN THERE.

WANT ME TO COME WITH?

I GOT THIS. LET'S GET THESE INSIDE, AN' I'LL CATCH UP WITH YOU.

COULD BE A STRAY PEBBLE HIT THE CONE? IRON-NICKEL WOULD MESS WITH THE FIELD.

THAT'S WHAT I'M THINKING. IN WHICH CASE, IF WE LIGHT UP THE DRIVE IT COULD VAPORIZE.

YEAH. THAT SHIT CAN GET MESSY, AND FAST

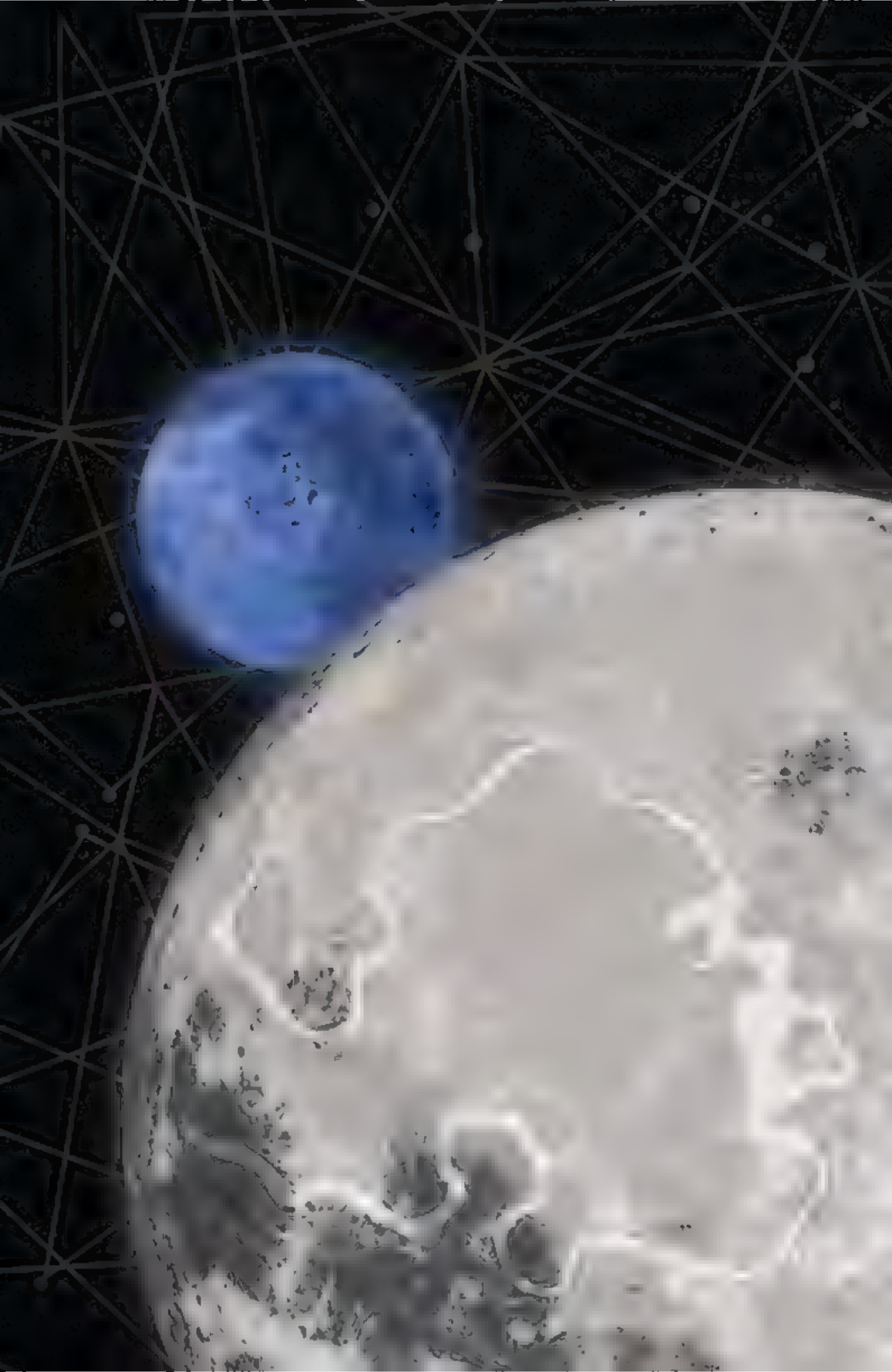
I'M NOT SEEING ANY HITS ON THE OUTER SHIELDING

GIMME A SEC AN' I'LL CHECK INSIDE

HUH.

YEAH, OKAY, I SEE THE PROBLEM

AN' I FOUND YOUR MISSIN' SCIENCE GUY.



CHAPTER SIX

VOICES.

I HEAR VOICES

OR MORE OF A-- A FEELING, I GUESS? THAT OLD INTUITION.

SOMETHING THERE A PATTERN IN THE CHAOS CALLING OUT TO ME..

DID PHOEBE CALL OUT ?

ALL ALONE, CRYING IN THE DARK FOR A BILLION YEARS--AND NO ONE THERE TO HEAR IT

IT JUST WANTED TO-- TO BECOME. ALL THIS.

BUT THE WORK--

SHIT

WHAT-- WHAT IF IT'S NOT DONE YET?

THE DEAD THE DEAD WOULD KNOW--

GOD, IS--IS THAT WHAT THEY ARE?

ON THE OTHER SIDE. SCRATCHING AT THE WALLS..

I DO HEAR THEM.

I DO.

WE--WE SHOULDN'T BE HERE

WRONG PLACE WRONG UNIVERSE.

GOD, I NEED TO SLEEP, I KNOW, BUT I--

I WORRY...

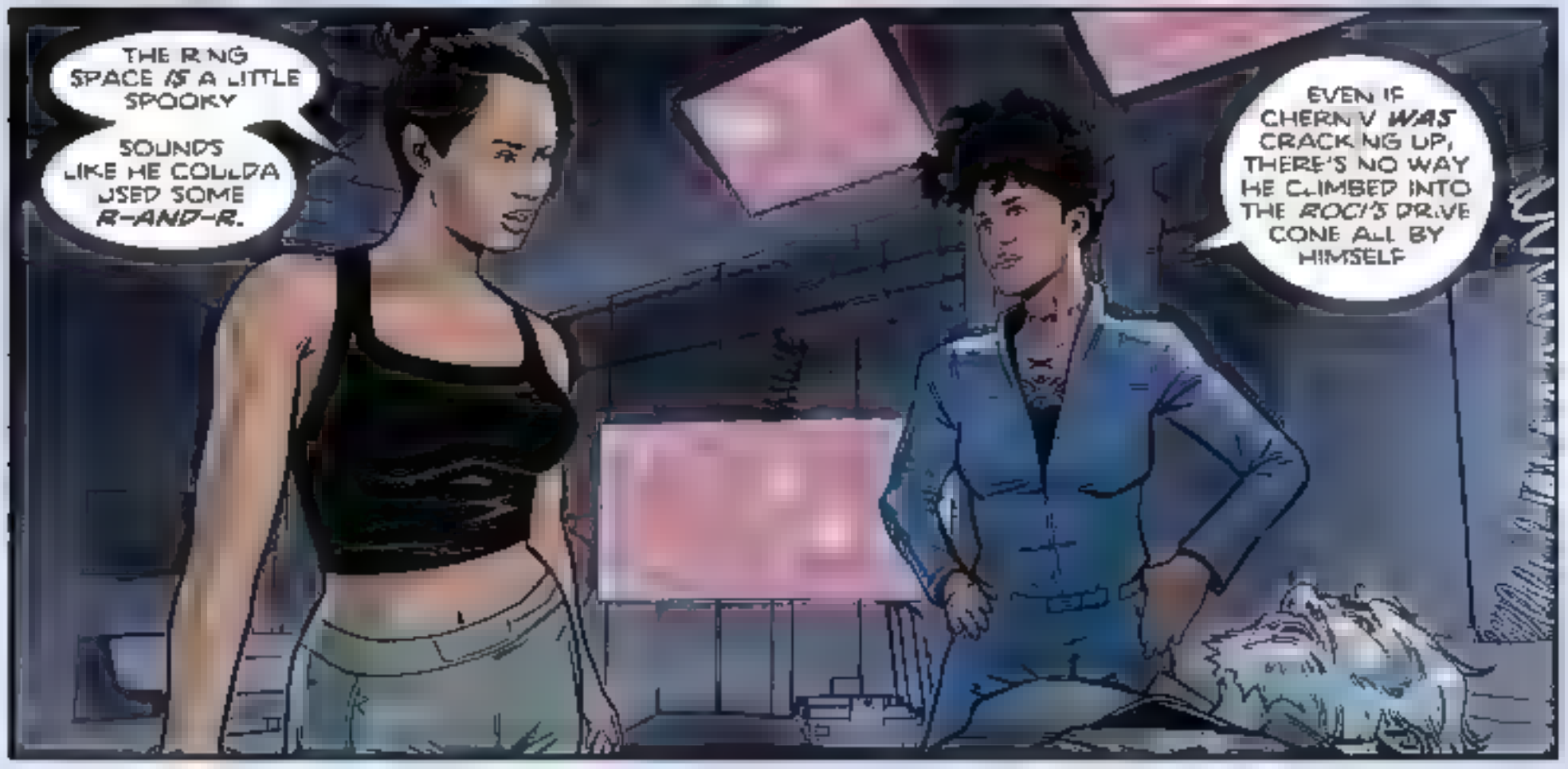
THIS PLACE

I THINK IT MIGHT BE HELL.

OKAY

SO I'M NO SHRINK, BUT THAT'S KINDA FUCKED UP.

DOCTOR CHERNOV'S LAST JOURNAL ENTRY
ACCORDING TO THE SYSTEM, HE HADN'T SLEPT IN DAYS


THE RING SPACE *IS* A LITTLE SPOOKY
SOUNDS LIKE HE COULDA USED SOME *R-AND-R.*
EVEN IF CHERNOV *WAS* CRACKING UP, THERE'S NO WAY HE CLIMBED INTO THE *ROC'S* DRIVE CONE ALL BY HIMSELF

NOT WITHOUT A VAC SUIT
TRUST ME ON THAT

SO IT'S *MURDER.*

ROCI RECKONS THE CAUSE OF DEATH WAS BLUNT TRAUMA TO THE HEAD

MOST LIKELY BEFORE WE EVEN GOT HERE

SO SOMEONE ON THE RELAY STATION KILLED DOCTOR CHERNIV— AND THEN *WAITED* FOR US?

WHY? WERE THEY TRYING TO *FRAME* US?

MY GUESS? DESTROYING THE EVIDENCE

A STATION'S A CLOSED ENVIRONMENT, AND GETTING RID OF A BODY'S NOT AS EASY AS YOU MIGHT THINK.

RECYCLERS FLAG HUMAN REMAINS, AND THE RING SPACE IS BATHED IN RADAR.

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN JUST CHUCK A CORPSE OUT AN AIRLOCK WITHOUT EVERYONE TRACKING WHERE IT CAME FROM.

OKAY SO THEY HIDE THE BODY IN OUR DRIVE CONE--THINKING THE SECOND WE LIGHT UP, IT'S VAPORIZED

NO BODY NO MURDER

STANDARD PRE-FLIGHT CHECKS WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE SPOTTED IT

FORTUNATELY, LIFE'S TAUGHT ME TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LEVEL OF PARANOIA.

IF THEY HADN'T USED *MAG CLAMPS*, I'D HAVE BEEN NONE THE WISER.

SO I'M GUESSING WHOEVER DID THIS, THEY'RE *NOT* AN ENGINEER.

WHOEVER IT IS--*SOMEONE* ON THIS STATION IS A *KILLER.*

AND I'M GONNA *FIND* THEM.

HEY, CAP, HOLD UP A SEC.

BEFORE YOU GO ROUNDING UP THE WHOLE STATION FOR A RIGHTEOUS GRILLING—

WHAT, YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA?

YOUR SHIP, YOUR RULES.

BUT I DO HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH THIS KIND OF THING.

BACK ON MARS. YOUR INVESTIGATION FOR *AVASARALA*.

LOOK, THIS CHERNIV THING MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN A LOVERS' QUARREL. I GET IT

BUT THE NUMBER ONE RULE, WHEN YOU'RE INVESTIGATING THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO MIGHT *KILL* YOU FOR IT...?

IT'S BETTER IF THEY DON'T KNOW

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE PROVIDING *SECURITY* FOR THESE PEOPLE, AND WE'VE *ALREADY FAILED.*

ARE YOU SUGGESTING WE *COVER UP* A *MURDER?*

YES. I AM

FOR NOW

LET 'EM THINK THEY GOT AWAY WITH IT BUY US SOME TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WE'RE DEALING WITH.

IF WE GO HARD CHARGING IN THERE, WHOEVER DID THIS WILL JUST COVER THEIR TRACKS...

AND WE'LL HAVE PAINTED A *TARGET* ON OUR BACKS.

GOD DAMN

DOCTOR CHERNIV ARE YOU IN THERE?

PETYR...?

ANYONE SEEN DOCTOR CHERNIV? HE'S NOT ANSWERING COMMS

I'M SURE HE'S AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE

OH SHIT—

YOU'RE *NAOMI NAGATA!*

WELL SPOTTED

I--I'M SORRY, I

GOD, THIS IS EMBARRASSING. IT'S JUST, WHEN I HEARD WE'LL BE HITCHING A RIDE ON THE ACTUAL *ROCINANTE*...

I GOTTA ADMIT, I GOT A LITTLE EXCITED!

EVELYN MAYES. *EVE*. PLEASE, CALL ME EVE.

GOD, I'M TOTALLY BLOWING THIS...

IT'S FINE

FO KENG TO IM GUT

ACTUALLY, IT'S YOU I WAS LOOKING FOR. YOU'RE THE IASG SYSTEMS ENGINEER, YEAH?

WELL, TECHNICALLY I'M EMPLOYED BY THE TRANSPORT UNION BUT YEAH, I'VE BEEN HELPING OUT THE SCIENCE TEAM

THING IS, I'M GONNA NEED ACCESS TO CHERNIV'S PARTITION.

IS HE IN SOME KIND OF TROUBLE?

I REALLY COULDN'T SAY

WELL, I'M HAPPY TO HELP--BUT TO BE HONEST, YOU COULD PROBABLY CRACK IT YOURSELF

IT'S NOT LIKE THEY BUILT THIS PLACE WITH SECURITY IN MIND. IT WASN'T EVEN DESIGNED FOR PERMANENT HABITATION.

I'M A BELTER. BELIEVE ME, I'VE KNOWN WORSE

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I M SORRY.

I KNOW THIS MUST COME AS A TERRIBLE SHOCK.

MY GOD POOR PETYR.

WHY WOULD ANYONE *DO* A THING LIKE THIS?

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT

I'M CONFIDING IN YOU BECAUSE I *TRUST* YOU AND FRANKLY, TO ELIMINATE YOU FROM OUR ENQUIRIES.

FAYEZ, OF COURSE

WAIT AM I A *SUSPECT?*

NOT AT ALL. I'M JUST TRYING TO ESTABLISH THE FACTS.

BUT FOR NOW, IT WOULD BE BETTER IF WE KEPT THIS BETWEEN US

I—I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN DO THAT. JUST CARRY ON LIKE NOTHING'S WRONG...

HAD ANYTHING ELSE HAPPENED LATELY WITH DOCTOR CHERNIV? PERSONAL ANIMOSITY, TROUBLE WITH THE CREW...?

NO, NOTHING LIKE THAT. PETYR KEPT VERY MUCH TO HIMSELF.

TOO MUCH, PERHAPS.

WE FOUND A VIDEO LOG ON HIS HAND TERMINAL. HE SEEMED UPSET

ERRATIC, EVEN.

THAT WAS PETYR.

WE THROW THE WORD AROUND TOO MUCH, BUT HE'S A— *WAS*...A *GENIUS*, A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION MIND

BUT SOMETIMES THAT COMES WITH ITS OWN DEMONS

DEMONS?

MILD SCHIZOPHRENIA

PETYR RESENTED HIS MEDICATION. SAID IT INTERFERED WITH HIS FLOW STATE

RIGHT. OKAY THAT SEEMS RELEVANT

DOCTOR CHERNIV SAID HE HEARD *VOICES*—

HOLDEN SERIOUSLY?

I'M AWARE OF THE IRONY

IF *YOU* HADN'T HEARD A VOICE FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE, WE WOULDN'T EVEN *BE* HERE!

THE *GATES* WOULD NEVER HAVE *OPENED!*

THAT WAS DIFFERENT. YOU HEARD MILLER, TOO.

OR SOMETHING PRETENDING TO BE HIM. A *COPY*, AND COPIES CAN BE STORED, TRANSMITTED—

WAIT. MILLER'S *GONE*, WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING...?

HONESTLY? I DON'T KNOW. I'M JUST...

THIS ISN'T MY FIELD. I'M A *BIOLOGIST.* I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M *DOING* [redacted]

I DON'T KNOW HOW WE'RE SUPPOSED TO CARRY ON WITHOUT— WITHOUT PETYR.

YOUR TEAM KNOWS THESE RINGS BETTER THAN ANYONE

THE ONLY THING I KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT THE RING BEGAN WITH *EROS...*

AND ITS INHABITANTS.

"AND MILLER WAS JUST ONE OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND SOULS."

FEELS WEIRD, PLAYIN' COP

NOT SURE I'M THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE. JUST WATCH NAOMI'S BACK.

SHE'll DIG INTO THE STATION SYSTEM WHILE I CROSS-CHECK THE CREW FILES, AND HOLDEN DOES. HOLDEN STUFF.

YOU THINK SHIT'S GOIN' DOWN?

WITH THIS BUNCH OF EGGHEADS? HONESTLY, I DOUBT IT.

MMC FORCE RECON

GOLIATH III

BATTLE ENVIRONMENT TACTICAL SYSTEM

BESIDES, IT'D BE A SHAME TO WAKE UP *BETSY.*

HIS FILE STRUCTURE'S A *MESS*...

BUT IT LOOKS LIKE CHERNIV WAS OBSESSING OVER SOME KIND OF *PATTERN MATCHING* ALGORITHM FOR THE *VIRTUAL PARTICLE* BACKGROUND

OKAY DUMB IT DOWN A LITTLE?

EMPTY SPACE ISN'T EMPTY. AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT DUST OR STRAY HYDROGEN.

AT THE QUANTUM LEVEL, PARTICLES ARE POPPING IN AND OUT OF EXISTENCE ALL THE TIME

ZERO-POINT SHIT

EXACTLY. IT'S AT SUCH AN INFINITESIMAL SCALE, NORMALLY WE DON'T EVEN NOTICE

BUT NEAR THE RING GATES, THINGS GET A LITTLE WEIRD

FIGURES

THOSE SENSORS YOU COLLECTED, THEY WERE LISTENING FOR SOME KIND OF *PATTERN* IN THE QUANTUM BACKGROUND NOISE

LIKE IT WAS MODULATED...?

POPSICLE GUY HEARD VOICES.

YOU FIGURE THE RING WAS *TALKIN'* TO HIM? OR THOSE THINGS ON THE OTHER SIDE?

THAT IS *NOT* A COMFORTING THOUGHT

THE ALGORITHM'S STILL ON HERE, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE HE WIPED THE RAW DATA.

WE'D HAVE TO TUNE OUT EVERY OTHER SIGNAL COMING THROUGH THE SOL RELAY.

AND THAT'S A *LOT.*

HANG ON. WHERE ARE THOSE SENSORS NOW?

PEACHES STOWED 'EM ON THE *ROCI* WITH THE REST OF THE SCIENCE SHIT

CAN YOU BRING ME ONE...?

IF THE RAW DATA'S STILL IN THE BUFFER, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO RUN IT THROUGH CHERNIV'S ALGORITHM.

SEE IF HE WAS REALLY ONTO SOMETHING.

. OR JUST NUTS.

ALL RIGHT, I'M ON IT. NEED ANYTHING [redacted]

GINGER TEA WOULD BE NICE!

THAT'S EXTRA.

YAWN!

SOMETHING THERE

ALL ALONE

WHO'S THERE?

JIM, IS THAT YOU

SCRATCHING AT THE WALLS

ALL RIGHT, AMOS, IF YOU'RE MESSING WITH ME, I SWEAR—

THIS PLACE

MIGHT BE HELL

WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT—?!

NOPE.
NOT HAVING IT
FUCK THIS
FUCK'S SAKE--!
ALRIGHT, WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU'VE HAD A GOOD LAUGH.
BUT IF YOU THINK I'M SCARED OF A *LOCKED DOOR*-- TOUGH SHIT, I'M AN *ENGINEER*—
CRYING IN THE DARK

MAIN POWER OFFLINE

EMERGENCY LIGHTING ACTIVATED

UNAVAILABLE
>> DENIED <<
>> LOCKED <<

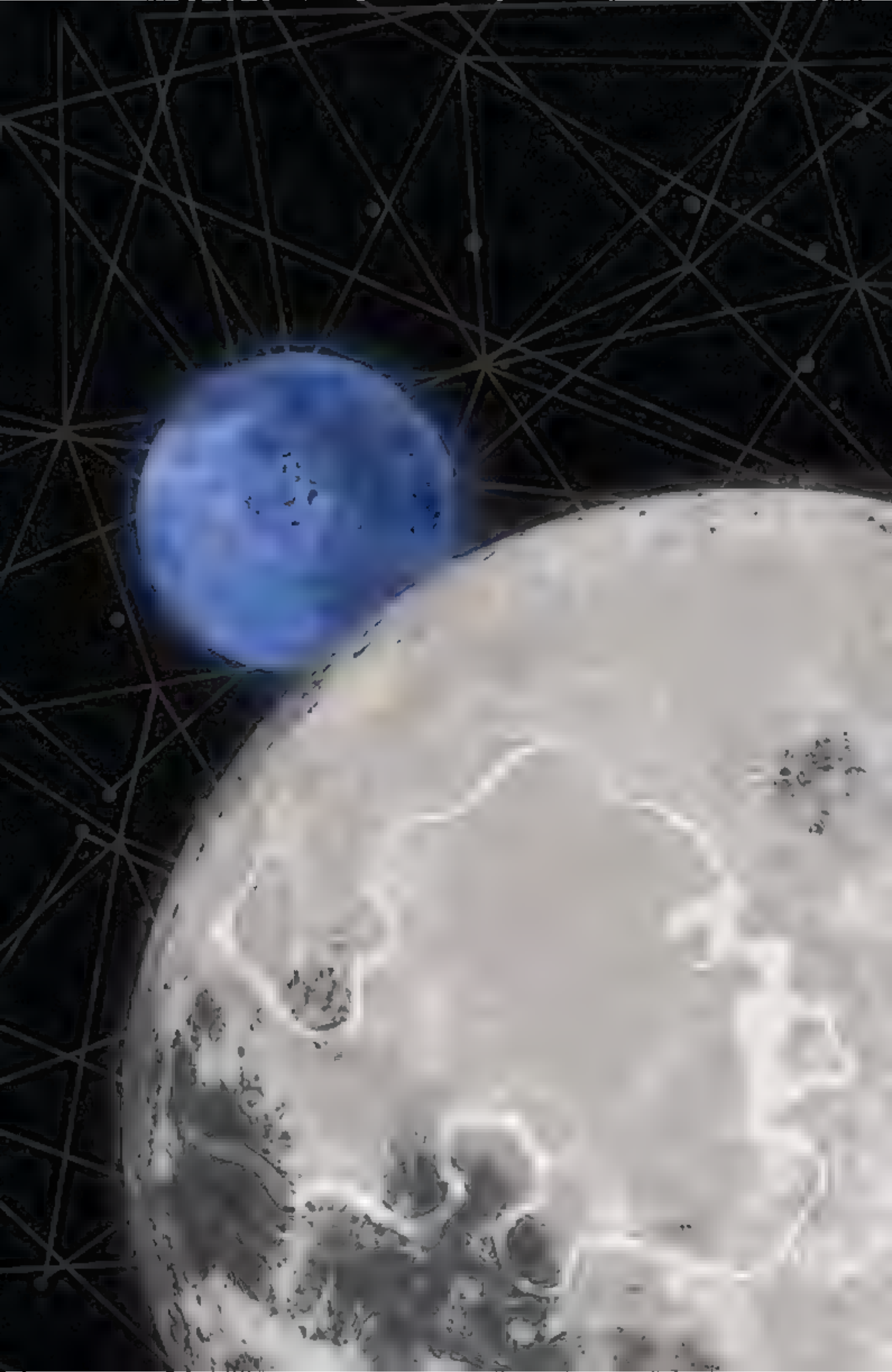
JIM, AMOS, WHOEVER'S LISTENING—

I'M LOCKED IN THE GATE CHAMBER—AND THERE'S SOMEONE IN HERE WITH ME

MY COMMS ARE LOCKED OUT, SO I'M RECORDING THIS JUST IN CASE.

SO WHATEVER HAPPENS.

YOU'LL *KNOW* IT WASN'T AN ACCIDENT



CHAPTER SEVEN

NEED A HAND WITH THOSE CREW FILES?

I DON'T REALLY HAVE ANYTHING TO DO RIGHT NOW

INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL SURVEY GROUP

WHAT EVEN IS THAT? LIKE A *U.N.* THING?

I THINK THEY'RE FROM PRETTY MUCH EVERYWHERE REALLY IT SHOULD BE *INTERSTELLAR.* NOT *INTERNATIONAL.*

IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'VE GOT UNIVERSITIES ON ILLS.

NOT *YET.*

ALRIGHT, SO. NO CAMERAS ON THE STATION, WHICH ISN'T GREAT AND NOTHING SUSPICIOUS ON F.L.E.

TWENTY UNION CREW PLUS SIX *IASG*, FIVE WITHOUT CHERNIV

THAT'S ASSUMING THE BODY REALLY *IS* CHERNIV

I MEAN, THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DISAPPEAR.

[illegible] YOU'RE RIGHT. [illegible] VERIFY THE DNA AGAINST HIS FILE

CAN WE EVEN TRUST THE FILE?

WELL, IF NOT, I MEAN. WHAT ARE WE EVEN DOING HERE?

I'M JUST SAYING, [illegible] *MANIPULATED.* [illegible] SPENT TWO YEARS BEING *MELBA KOH.*

NOT THAT IT WAS EASY, OR CHEAP OR, Y'KNOW, *SMART.*

UGHH

WHEN THE ROCKS FELL, A LOT OF EARTH FILES GOT SCRAMBLED OR LOST. AND THEN THE GATES OPENED UP THE GOLD RUSH

IT'S LIKE THEY'RE NOT EVEN *BOTHERING* TO KEEP TRACK ANYMORE

IT'S WHY I STILL USE MY REAL NAME. NOBODY CARES

WELCOME TO THE *WILD WEST.*

OKAY, NOW YOU SOUND LIKE *ALEX.*

I GUESS OUT HERE, YOU CAN JUST BECOME A WHOLE NEW PERSON.

ALL IT TAKES IS TIME

SOMETHING THERE

I KNOW SOMEONE'S THERE.

CALLING OUT

I SAW YOU.

AND I KNOW YOU'RE NOT CHERNIV

I HEARD THAT AUDIO LOG, TOO.

SO HOWEVER YOU THINK THIS IS GONNA WORK OUT, IT'S NOT—

AAH, SHIT—!

SHOULDN'T BE HERE

NO ONE HERE. DOORS ARE STILL SEALED. BUT I *SAW* SOMEONE, I SWEAR.

WAIT A SECOND— MY PLASMA TORCH *FLARED*...

MY HANDS ARE SHAKING. HEART RACING. AND IT'S NOT *FEAR*...

WELL, NOT *JUST* FEAR.

THE ROOM'S *HYPEROXYGENATED!*

WRONG PLACE

OH SHIT—

TRAP! PROXIMITY TRIGGER—

UNGH--!

HEY! YOU STEALING OUR SH.T ?

THAT AN OPTION?

JUST MESSING WITH YOU.

I'M MAYES—

YEP

WE, UH... WE DON'T GET A LOT OF NEW FACES AROUND HERE ESPECIALLY FACES LIKE YOURS.

UH-HUH.

SO LISTEN, I GOTTA TAKE TH'S SOMEPLACE

I THOUGHT WE WERE ALL PACKED UP AND READY TO GO IS THERE A PROBLEM?

EMERGENCY FIRE. SECTION B-4.

EMERGENCY [redacted]

SECTION G-4.

WE SHOULD GET TO THE---

GET THE FUCK OUTTA MY WAY!

NAOMI!

NAOMI--!

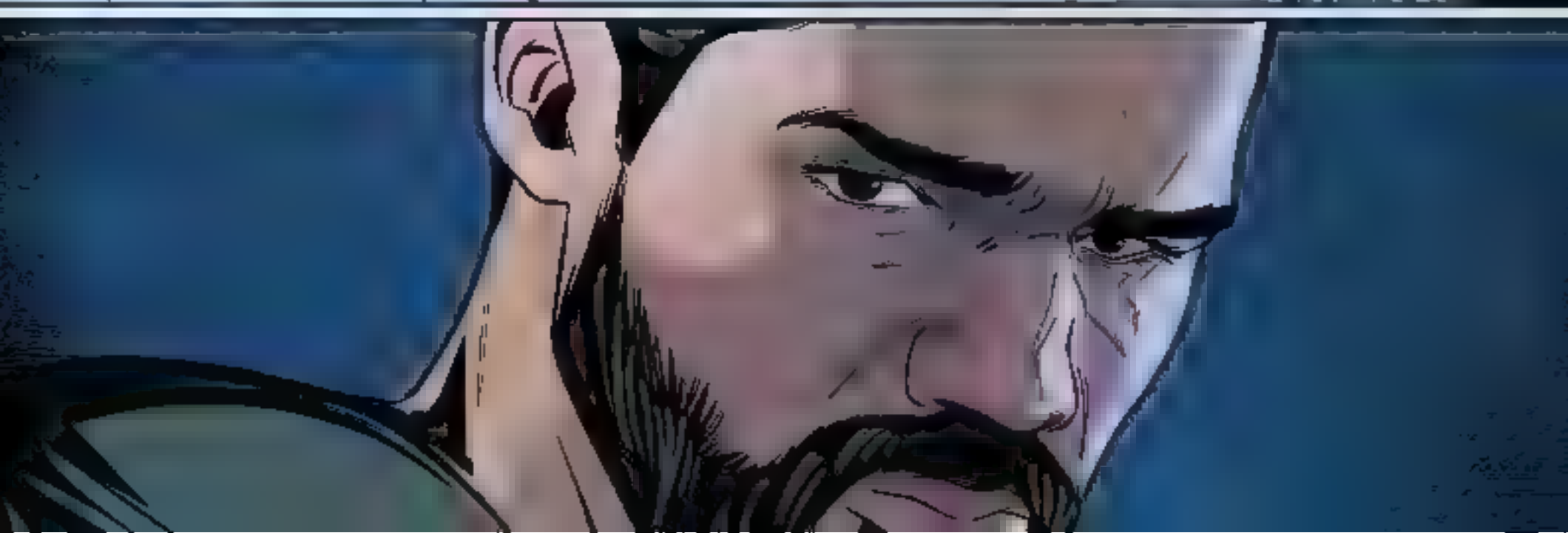
THESE BULKHEADS SEAL FOR A *REASON!* FIRE COULD *SPREAD* TO THE WHOLE--

DON'T MAKE ME GO THROUGH YOU.

MASTER ALARM!

MASTER ALARM! EN ROUTE TO YOUR POSITION!

OH MY GOD.



I *LISTENED* TO YOU. HUSHED IT UP. PRETENDED EVERYTHING WAS OKAY.

AND NAOMI ALMOST *DIED!*

THERE'S NO WAY WE COULD'VE KNOWN--

SAVE IT

I'M GONNA DO WHAT I SHOULD'VE DONE THE MOMENT WE FOUND CHERNIV'S BODY

HE'S JUST BLOWING OFF STEAM.

YEAH, BUT HE'S NOT WRONG. WE FUCKED UP.

YOU TOLD ME TO WATCH NAOMI'S BACK, AND I DIDN'T.

THAT'S ON ME.

THIS IS *JAMES HOLDEN.*

THE STATION IS NOW ON *LOCKDOWN.* ALL CREW—AND I MEAN *ALL*—ARE TO ASSEMBLE IN CARGO LOCK FIVE *IMMEDIATELY.*

*ANYONE WHO DOESN'T SHOW UP WILL BE ASSUMED TO BE A **FUGITIVE** FROM JUSTICE—AND TREATED ACCORDINGLY.*

YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

YOU THINKIN' WHAT I'M THINKIN'?

YEP

TIME TO WAKE UP *BETSY.*

JUST ROUTINE, MA'AM IT'S FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY

LOOK DIRECTLY INTO THE SCANNER, PLEASE

THIS IS *OUTRAGEOUS!* YOU CAN'T TREAT US ALL LIKE *CRIMINALS—!*

BACK UP SERIOUSLY

HOLDEN, WOULD YOU MIND EXPLAINING WHAT THE HELL YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

HOLDEN ?

DOCTOR CHERNIV IS *DEAD.* HE WAS *MURDERED*—BY SOMEONE ON THIS STATION.

NOW AN ATTEMPT HAS BEEN MADE TO TAKE THE LIFE OF ONE OF MY *CREW.*

AND THAT KIND OF THING, I TAKE *PERSONALLY.*

I NEED EACH OF YOU TO ACCOUNT FOR YOUR *EXACT* WHEREABOUTS OVER THE LAST 24 HOURS

NOBODY LEAVES THIS ROOM UNTIL WE'RE DONE.

THAT'S EVERYONE ACCOUNTED FOR BUT ONE--*CADIE COLE*. JUNIOR RECYCLING TECH.

FIND HER. TEAR THIS PLACE APART IF YOU HAVE TO.

CAP WE CAN'T SEARCH THE ENTIRE STATION *AND* WATCH EVERYONE AT THE SAME TIME

SO CONFINE THEM TO QUARTERS

HOLDEN. *JIM.* THIS IS *EXTREME*-- AND I THINK YOU KNOW THAT

I UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERN. BUT I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR SECURITY, AND RIGHT NOW THERE'S AN ACTIVE THREAT

NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME

"WE HAVE A PROBLEM."

ARE YOU SECURE?

FOR NOW

ROOK SCREWED UP HOLDEN'S CREW— THEY FOUND CHERNOV'S BODY

NAGATA STARTED DIGGING INTO HIS PARTITION, AND—I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE MIGHT HAVE FOUND IN THERE

IT'S YOUR JOB TO KNOW.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH *SHIT* I'M JUGGLING RIGHT NOW? HOW MUCH *DATA* GOES THROUGH THIS RELAY *EVERY SECOND?*

FINE, I GOT US A BACKDOOR INTO MEDINA T-C, BUT I CAN'T TRACK *ALL* RELAY COMMS IN *REAL TIME*—

FOCUS.

REPORT

I'D HAVE MORE TO TELL YOU IF I KNEW WHAT YOUR *JARHEADS* ARE PLAYING AT.

SORRY, YOU WANT THAT IN *SPOOK?*

"COMPARTMENTALIZATION IS NEGATIVELY IMPACTING MY SITUATIONAL AWARENESS."

YOU SOUND EMOTIONAL.

I NEED TO *WORRY* ABOUT YOU?

NO. I'M SORRY, SIR. IT'S JUST--IT'S A *LOT.*

CHERNIV'S SENSORS PICKED UP BACKSCATTER FROM OUR ENCRYPTED CHANNEL. *THIS* CHANNEL.

HE WAS ONTO US--EVEN IF HE DIDN'T KNOW IT YET

SO YOU TOOK HIM OUT

YOU FUCK IT UP?

ROOK WAS SUPPOSED TO DISPOSE OF THE BODY. DRIVE CONE, STANDARD M-O. BUT THEY USED *MAB CLAMPS*, WHICH OBVIOUSLY FLAGGED UP ON THE CO… SENSORS

I COULD'VE *WARNED* THEM ABOUT THAT, IF YOU'D JUST TOLD ME ROOK'S *IDENTITY*--

NEED TO KNOW. THAT'S WHY I KEEP YOU COMPARTMENTED

THIS ISN'T A COMPARTMENT, IT'S A FUCKING… *PRESSURE COOKER!*

TEN YEARS, IT TOOK US TO GET HERE AND ROOK'S [redacted] IT--!

ROOK'S A LOST LIMB. TIE IT OFF.

PIN THE CODE ON ROOK. CERES BACKGROUND

YOU GOT US MEDINA. WE DON'T NEED THE RELAY INTERCEPTS ANY MORE

THAT--

SIR, THAT'S ONE *HELL* OF A PAWN SACRIFICE

"AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE STILL IN THE GAME."

NAOMI WAS RIGHT

IT WAS A *TRAP*—RIGGED TO LOOK LIKE AN *ACCIDENT.*

NEAR AS I CAN FIGURE FROM HER VOICE LOG, THEY USED A HAND TERMINAL TO LURE HER OVER THERE

GAS CANISTERS RIGGED TO BLOW

THE VENTS WERE SEALED BEFOREHAND, AND THE ROOM FLOODED WITH *O2.*

FIRE DOESN'T BEHAVE NORMALLY IN ZERO G.

HOT AIR WON'T *RISE* AND DRAW IN MORE OXYGEN TO FUEL THE FLAME—SO YOU'D NEED TO *PREP* IT

HERE'S THE KICKER. NAOMI SAID SHE *SAW* SOMEONE—EVEN THOUGH THE DOORS WERE SEALED

I FIGURED MAYBE SHE WAS *HALLUCINATING.* HYPEROXYGENATED IT HAPPENS

BUT NAOMI'S *SMART.* SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW THE SIGNS. HIGH PULSE, MUSCLE TREMORS

EVEN SO, SHE SOUNDED SO *SURE.* SO I LOOKED AGAIN.

AND I FOUND *THIS.*

MAINTENANCE DUCTS?

PRETTY INNOCUOUS, RIGHT? EXCEPT I CHECKED IT AGAINST THE STATION SCHEMATICS

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO [redacted]

WAIT YOU FOUND A *SECRET DOOR?*

IT'S FULL OF CABLING POWER. DATA.

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, IT LEADS RIGHT THROUGH THE SUPERSTRUCTURE TO THE OUTER HULL.

RATS N THE WALLS.

YOU DID GOOD, CLARISSA.

BACK AT THANKSGIVING, WHEN I SAID I WAS GRATEFUL FOR *ALL* OF YOU—I *MEANT* IT

MAYBE BOBBIE AND AMOS ARE THE ONES WHO NEED TO HEAR THAT RIGHT NOW

YEAH SHIT

I WAS KIND OF AN ASSHOLE I SHOULD APOLOGIZE

THEY GET IT. WE ALL DO. WE WOULDN'T BE HERE OTHERWISE.

SO WHAT DO YOU SAY WE GO GET THE SON OF A BITCH WHO DID THIS.

BOBBIE AMOS

YOU'RE UP

. ZERO CONTACTS

CABLING BRANCHES OFF INTO EVERY PART OF THE STATION. WHATEVER IT IS, IT RUNS THROUGH THIS PLACE LIKE A **CANCER.**

PRESSURE DOOR. SEALED.

I'M UP NEAR THE OUTER HULL. NO WAY OF KNOWING IF THE OTHER SIDE'S PRESSURIZED

IF NOT IT'LL POP YOU OUT LIKE A CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE

THE SUIT CAN HANDLE IT

IS THE BLISTER SECURE?

WE'RE GOOD HERE.

IT'S YOUR CALL, BOBBIE

ALRIGHT, I'M GOING FOR IT STAND BY

NNNGH—!

I'M E-V-A.

THE CABLES CONNECT TO. LOOKS LIKE SOME KIND OF **TIGHTBEAM RIG.** IT'S NOT ON THE SCHEMATICS.

STILL NO CONTACTS

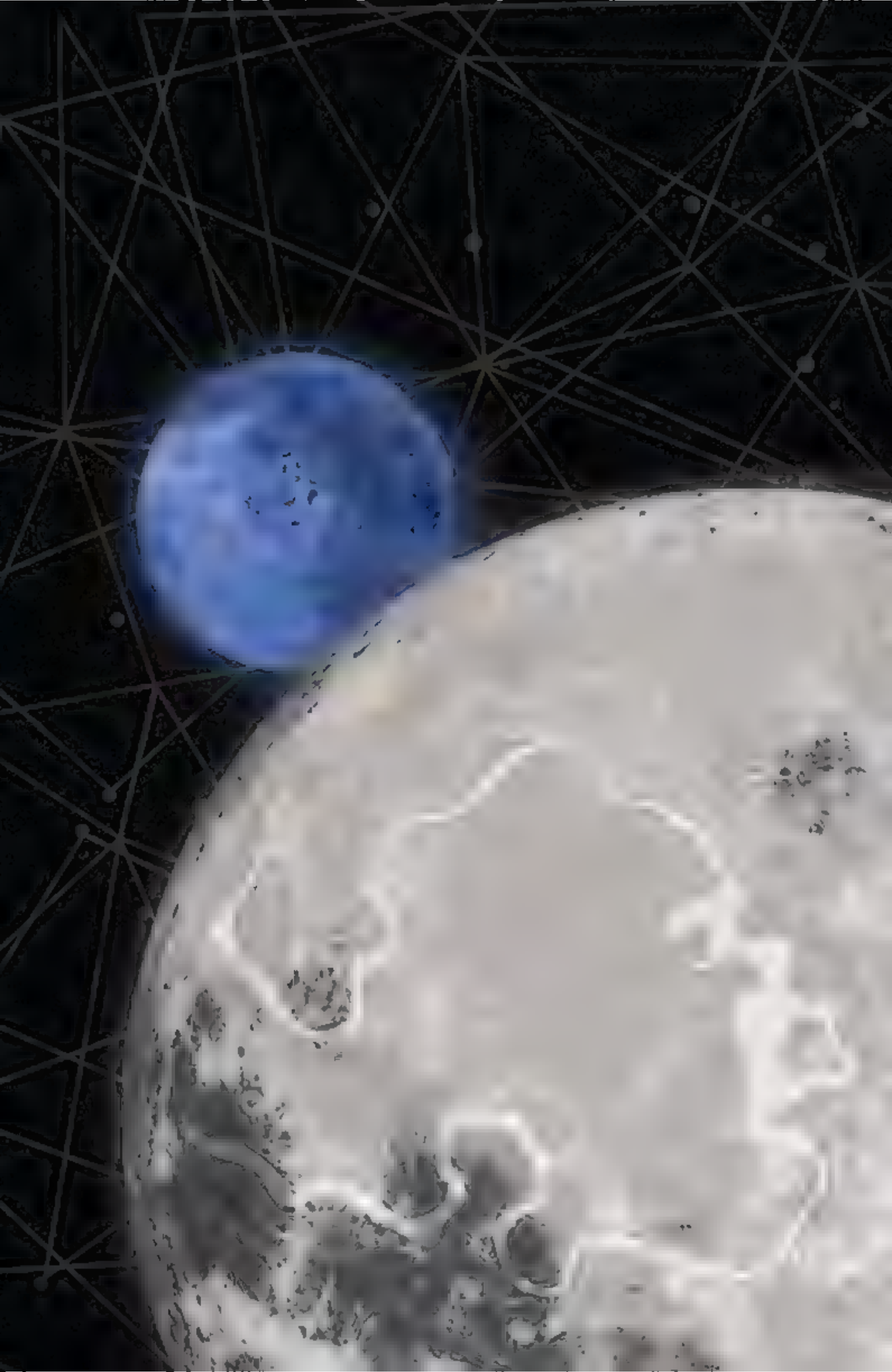
SHIT! SCRATCH THAT.

THREE CONTACTS.

DRAPER

WHEN THEY SAID THEIR DRONES WERE A LITTLE SQUIRRELLY ?

UNDERSTATEMENT!



CHAPTER EIGHT

THESE MECHS DON'T SEEM TOO SMART. GUESSING THEY TRIGGERED AUTOMATICALLY--

GAH--!

MY LOADOUT'S ARMOR-PIERCING. CAN'T GET A CLEAR SHOT WITHOUT VENTING THE STATION!

GIMME A SEC--

SETTLE DOWN, YOU.

UNGHH—!

FUCK. THESE THINGS ARE BUILT!

ARM'S TRAPPED—

SECOND MECH CLOSING BACK IN. .

NEED TO BUY MYSELF A LITTLE SPACE HERE—!

RRAAAGH--!

BETTER.

CLEAR.

OKAY, SO. LOOKS LIKE THIS BOOTLEG **TIGHTBEAM RIG'S** WELDED TO THE HULL.

GREAT WORK, BOBBIE!

HANG TIGHT AND WE'LL GET SOME CUTTING GEAR OUT TO YOU—

ZHHHHH

OR, YEP I GUESS THAT WORKS, TOO.

YOU GUYS GETTING ANYWHERE WITH THAT THING?

NOPE IT'S PRETTY MUCH FUCKED

THE MOMENT THOSE MECHS ACTIVATED, THE R.G'S COMM BUFFER FUSED ITSELF INTO A BLOB OF GRAPHENE SLAG.

GREAT SO THE ONLY WAY TO FIND OUT WHO *CADIE COLE* WAS COMMUNICATING WITH..

IS TO *FIND* HER.

SHE'S GONE

NAOMI--!

YOU SHOULDN'T BE UP! ARE YOU OKAY ?

I'LL BE FINE I WANTED TO HELP SO I'M HELPING.

I FIGURED, CHERNIV'S KILLER KNOWS THEY CAN'T HIDE ON THE RELAY FOREVER. SO I CHECKED THE DOCKING LOGS.

ONE OF THE *CARGO SKIFFS* IS *MISSING.*

SHIT, HOW DID WE MISS THAT?

SHE BYPASSED THE DOCK SYSTEM AND KILLED THE TRANSPONDER.

SO, AIR REFILL SHOWS *EXACTLY* WHEN THE SKIFF DECOUPLED

THE GOOD NEWS IS, SHE CAN'T HAVE GONE FAR. NOT IN A SKIFF. IT'S BASICALLY A *TRASH CAN* WITH AN *EPSTEIN* BOLTED ON.

AND SHE CAN'T CROSS ANY *RING GATES* WITHOUT THE UNION'S *RAILGUNS* BLOWING HER TO SCRAP.

SO SHE'S TRAPPED IN THE RING SPACE. WITH US

SHE'S NOT GETTING AWAY. NOT AFTER WHAT SHE DID

SHOW ME ALL TRAFFIC IN THE RING SPACE

OKAY, NOW DROP EVERYTHING WITH AN ACTIVE TRANSPONDER.

GOT HER. PROJECTED DESTINATION IS—

...OF COURSE THE ONE PLACE WITH NO PRYING EYES. THE *SENTINEL*.

MAKES SENSE. SHE KNOWS IT'S STANDING EMPTY 'TIL WE SHIP THE EGGHEADS OVER THERE

THAT'S NOT HAPPENING UNTIL WE HAVE CADIE COLE IN CUSTODY

WHATEVER'S REALLY GOING ON HERE, SHE CAN'T BE WORKING ALONE.

I WANT TO KNOW WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED— AND WHY.

NAOMI, IT MIGHT BE BEST IF YOU SIT THIS ONE OUT.

NO WAY. FORGET IT.

COLE RAN RIOT THROUGH THE RELAY SYSTEM. IF SHE DOES THE SAME ON THE SENTINEL, YOU'RE GONNA *NEED* ME OUT THERE.

BESIDES. PULLING A FEW G'S WILL HELP WITH THE HEALING.

FOR ALL WE KNOW, SHE COULD HAVE A *FIRETEAM* LYING IN WAIT FOR US, COVERING THE A.R.LOCK.

SO LET'S WATCH THOSE DOORS AND CORNERS.

SUIT UP. THIS MURDER INVESTIGATION JUST TURNED INTO A *MANHUNT.*

TU SENTINEL

HAULER MONZCARRO, THIS IS CAPTAIN JAMES HOLDEN OF THE ROCINANTE.

ARE ANY OF YOUR CREW STILL ABOARD THE SENTINEL?

NA, BERATNA. MILOWDA DEPLOY AN' PULL BACK FROM EXCLUSION ZONE.

NA WANYA GET TOO CLOSE TO LACONIA RING, SASA KE?

UNDERSTOOD LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY

WE'RE IN PURSUIT OF A FUGITIVE, AND SHE MAY WELL BE ARMED

LET MILOWDA HELP YOU!

ARROKOTH COLLECTIVE BEAT FREE NAVY, BEAT PIRATE—AN' STILL WE STAND!

HAULED THAT SPOTTER UP THE WELL AN' ALL OUT HALF ACROSS THE SYSTEM FOR UNION.

'TIL MILOWDA GET PAY, MI NA WANYA SOME DZHEMANG COME TEAR IT APART!

CAPTAIN MULLIGAN, I APPRECIATE THE OFFER OF ASSISTANCE, BUT IT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I CAN'T GUARANTEE YOUR *SAFETY*—

WELCOME TO DA **BELT**, *GATAMANG! OUT HERE,* **SÉFETIYE** *ALL ABOUT WHO WATCH YOUR* **BACK**, *KEYA?*

MONZCARRO *OUT*

CAPTAIN?

CAPTAIN—!

GOD DAMN IT

THEY BETTER STAY THE FUCK OUTTA MY WAY

LIKE THE CAP SAID, DOORS AND CORNERS

CHECK YOUR BACKGROUND, AND STAY SHARP FOR BLUE-ON-BLUE

SENTINEL

WE CAN'T RISK A HARD DOCK--BUT THERE'S ONLY SO MANY PLACES SHE CAN HIDE

BOBBIE, TAKE POSITION AT THE MAIN AIRLOCK.

WE'LL CUT IN THROUGH THE AFT MAINTENANCE HATCH, THEN SWEEP AND CLEAR BACK TO YOU.

SURE YOU'VE THOUGHT THIS THROUGH, CAP?

OF THE THREE OF US, I'M THE ONE WHO'S BULLETPROOF.

WHEN IT COMES TO FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT, SO FAR HER PATTERN'S BEEN TO FLEE.

IF WE FLUSH HER OUT, I'M GUESSING SHE'LL RUN FOR THE SKIFF.

AND STRAIGHT INTO MY WELCOMING ARMS.

COPY THAT. STANDING BY

DRAPER

PLACE IS ON LOW-POWER MODE STILL PRESSURIZED, THOUGH

THAT COULD CHANGE IN A HURRY KEEP YOUR LID ON IN THERE

WE'RE IN.

DERELICT SHIP DARK AND CREEPY FEELS LIKE OLD TIMES.

DON'T REMIND ME. HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS GETTING US INTO BACK THEN.

HEADS UP. SOMEBODY FORCED THIS DOOR HYDRAULICS ARE CUT

I'LL BREACH, YOU COVER.

ON THREE

ONE.

TWO.

AAGH--!

UNHH.

TOSS THE WEAPON! TOSS IT!

GOOD BOY

YOU BRING ME YOUR *GUNSHIP?*

WELL NOW, *JAMES HOLDEN* HIMSELF LOOKS LIKE I JUST HIT THE *JACKPOT.*

CAP, BOBBIE OSCAR MIKE KEEP HER TALKING.

CADIE IF YOU THINK YOU GET TO JUST FLY AWAY FROM ALL THIS, YOU'RE VERY MUCH MISTAKEN.

BUT THERE'S NO NEED FOR ANY MORE BLOODSHED JJST TELL ME WHAT YOU NEED I'M SURE WE CAN WORK OUT SOME KIND OF A DEAL.

ALWAYS DID LOVE THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN VOICE, DIDN'T YOU?

SO NOBLE SO ***REASONABLE.***

MAKES ME ***SICK.***

MAYBE I DON'T NEED YOU AT ALL.

I'LL MAKE ***NAGATA*** GIVE ME YOUR SHIP CODES FLY ***MYSELF*** TO

WHO THE HELL...?

MULLIGAN. MONZCARRO, MI PENSA TO HOLDEN, KEYA...?

LIKE MI SAY BEFORE — SÉFETIYE ALL ABOUT WHO WATCH YOUR BACK!

ONE CHANCE! DROP IT OR DIE!

EASY, BOBBIE...!

MULLIGAN'S ON OUR SIDE — AND HE JUST SAVED MY LIFE.

MEDEVAC

THREAT: TRIVIAL

FRIENDLY

TELL YOU WHAT, CAP. NEXT T.ME, MAYBE LET BOBBIE TAKE POINT ON THE TACTICAL SH T.

NEXT TIME AND I'M SORRY I GOT YOU SHOT

AGAIN.

I'D SAY DON'T MAKE A HABIT OF IT, BUT I THINK WE BOTH KNOW THAT SHIP ALREADY SAILED

KOPENG TO, KOWLTING FO DA GUTS

HE'LL BE F.NE. SUIT TOOK SOME OF THE PUNCH OUT OF IT, AND AMOS IS A HARD MAN TO KILL.

SO LISTEN. EVERYTHING'S BEEN SO CRAZY THE LAST COUPLE DAYS, I NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO THANK YOU PROPERLY

THANK YOU, CAPTAIN MULLIGAN.

IM TA NATING, BERATNA.

GOT **BRAGGING RIGHT** NOW, KEYÁŽ M GHTY [redacted] OWE MI A **FAVOR!**

ANYTIME

THOUGH I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE ALREADY MADE QUITE A NAME FOR YOURSELF OUT HERE. YOUR ***ARROKOTH COLLECTIVE*** MAKES THE ARTIFICIAL SOIL FOR THE FARMS ON GANYMEDE AND MEDINA, RIGHT?

RING COLONIES ALSO. *IMALOWDA* CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF OUR *FELORAKAKA! SOYA*, ***SCRIP*** IS GOOD.

EVEN SO JUST LIKE YOU, BACK WHEN, FEEL LIKE *MI* BUILT FOR MORE THAN ***HAULER,*** *KEYA...?*

WELL BULL'S NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER, AND MEDINA'S ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR PEOPLE WHO KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THEMSELVES...

I'D BE HAPPY TO PUT IN A GOOD WORD, IF YOU LIKE?

ALL I ASK.

YAM SENG KOPENG!

SENTINEL

STEADY STATE SUPERPOSITION LOCKED IN. SENSORS ARE ALL IN THE GREEN.

PROBE IS READY AND STANDING BY. ON YOUR MARK, DOCTOR OKOYE.

IT DOES FEEL HORRIBLY LIKE

BEING IN CHARGE?

IT. IT'S THE PRICE OF BRILLIANCE.

TOGO.

WHAT?

ONCE WE'RE DONE HERE, PROMISE ME WE'LL GO BACK TO *TOGO.*

WALK ON THE BEACH. WATCH THE SUN SET. SLEEP IN A BED THAT ..HOLDS US DOWN TOGETHER.

I WANT TO FEEL A *WORLD* UNDER MY FEET UNDER *US.*

DEAL.

ONCE WE'RE DONE

ROCINANTE, THIS IS SENTINEL

WE ARE A GO FOR LACONIA PROBE LAUNCH.

ROGER THAT, ELV THRUSTERS ONLY. WE DON'T WANT THEM M STAKING THIS FOR AN ATTACK.

GOOD LUCK TO US ALL

PROBE IS AWAY

ON COURSE TELEMETRY'S GOOD CROSSING THE GATE

...NOW

PROBE HAS ENTERED THE LACONIA SYSTEM.

STAY DOWN, MOTHERFUCKERS.

MEDINA STATION

FIRST THINGS FIRST. ROOK TIED OFF?

AND CAUTERIZED

THEY THINK SHE WAS INTERCEPTING RELAY COMMS, SELLING STOLEN DATA TO A BROKER ON CERES. A REMNANT OF THE OLD SOHIRO NETWORK.

NAME RINGS A BELL.

SO THE *PROBE*. HOW LONG WAS IT IN-SYSTEM?

EIGHTY ONE SECONDS. EMP BACKSCATTER SUGGESTS IT WAS TAKEN OUT BY A RAILGUN STRIKE

TIME ENOUGH FOR OUR *MESSAGE* TO GET THROUGH.. ?

PLENTY I HID IT IN THE PROBE'S ACTIVE SENSOR PULSE ENCRYPTED ON A FREQUENCY THAT WON'T BLEED BACK THROUGH THE GATE.

CHERNIV'S RESEARCH PAID OFF FOR JS THERE

ラーメン

OUTSTANDING. SO *COMMAND* WILL HAVE FINALLY [redacted].

NOW THEY KNOW WE'RE STILL OUT IN THE COLD, FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT, THEY'LL BE FIGURING HOW TO BRING JS HOME

AND... IF THEY DON'T? IT'S BEEN *TEN YEARS* AND *NOTHING.* NOT *ONE WORD* FROM LACONIA.

THE HIGH CONSUL'S FINAL MESSAGE SOUNDED PRETTY UNEQUIVOCAL.

THE GATE IS *CLOSED.*

THAT'S FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE

WE JUST HAVE TO LIVE AMONG 'EM A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.

OR WE COULD LIVE AMONG THEM FOR *REAL.* I MEAN, WE'VE GOT A GOOD THING GOING HERE—

CAREFUL NOW, MAYES. THAT'S *MISSION CREEP* TALKING.

THE *REAL* ENEMY YOU NEED TO WATCH OUT FOR THE ONE INSIDE *YOURSELF.*

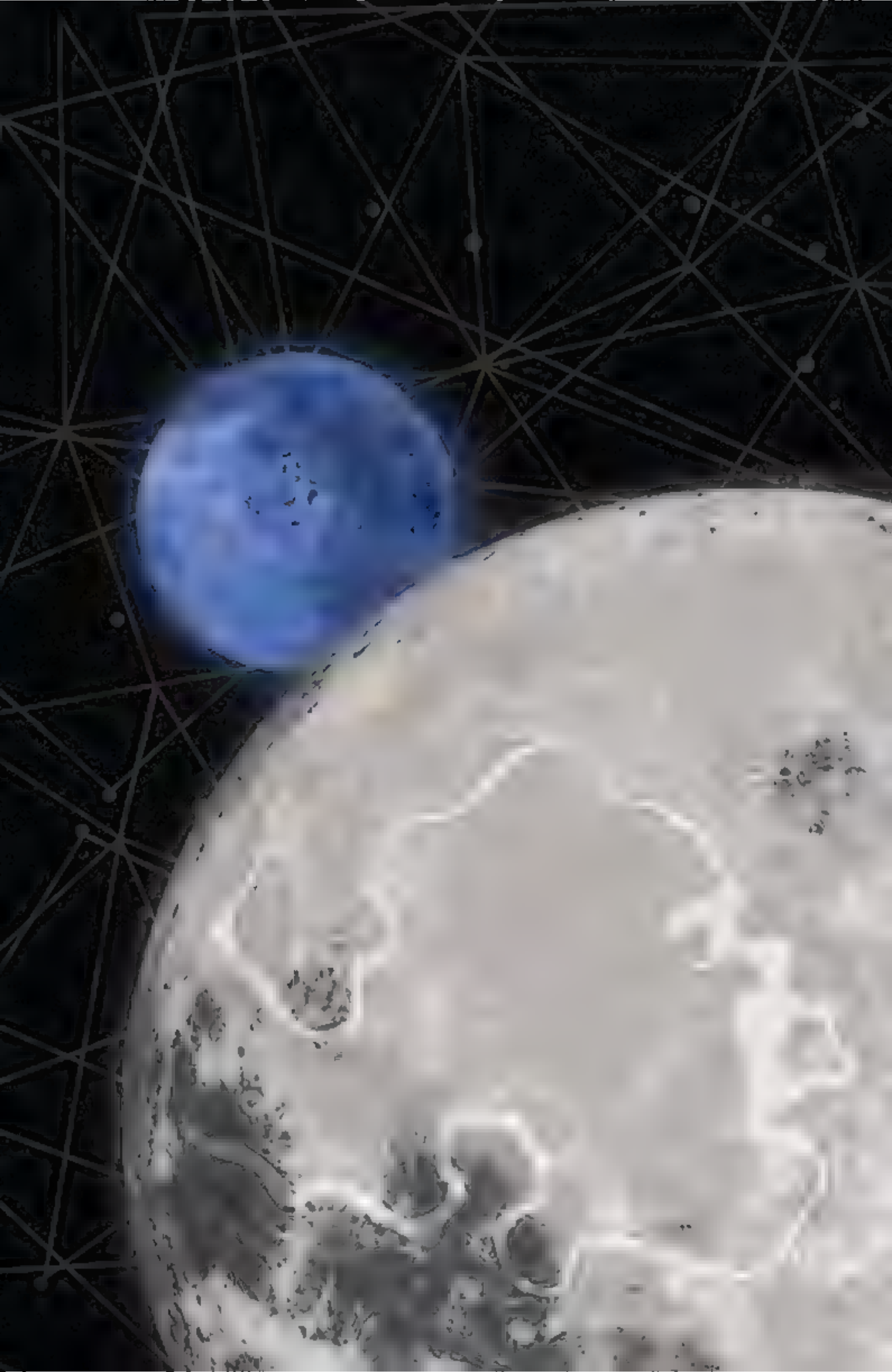
COMMAND WILL GET BACK TO US WITH ORDERS. CONTINGENCIES *COMMENDATIONS,* MOST LIKELY

MEANTIME, WE GET OURSELVES COMFORTABLE. RIGHT HERE ON MEDINA.

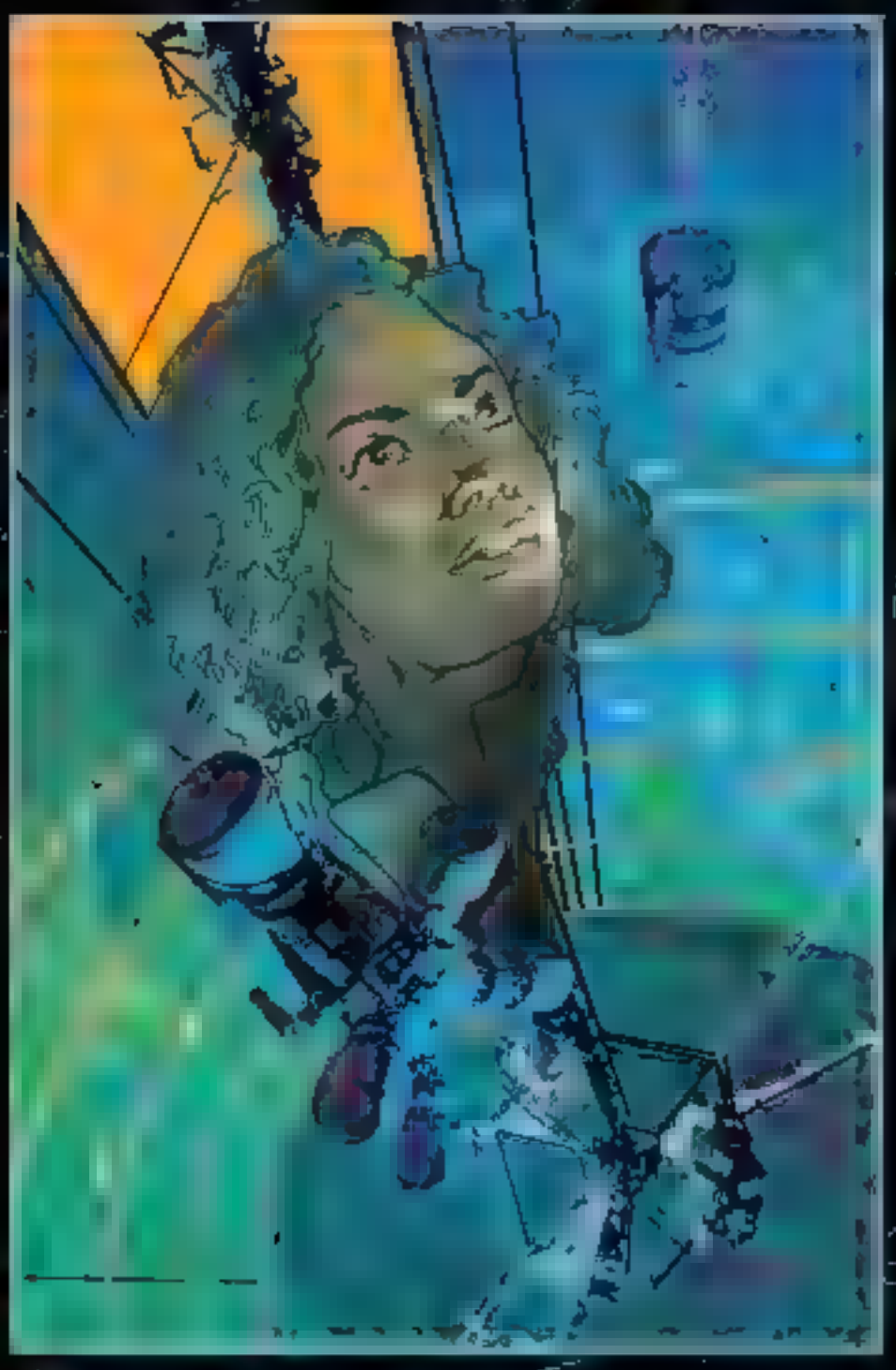
AND WE *WAIT.*

ALL YOU NEED . IS A LITTLE *FAITH.*

TO BE CONTINUED



COVER GALLERY



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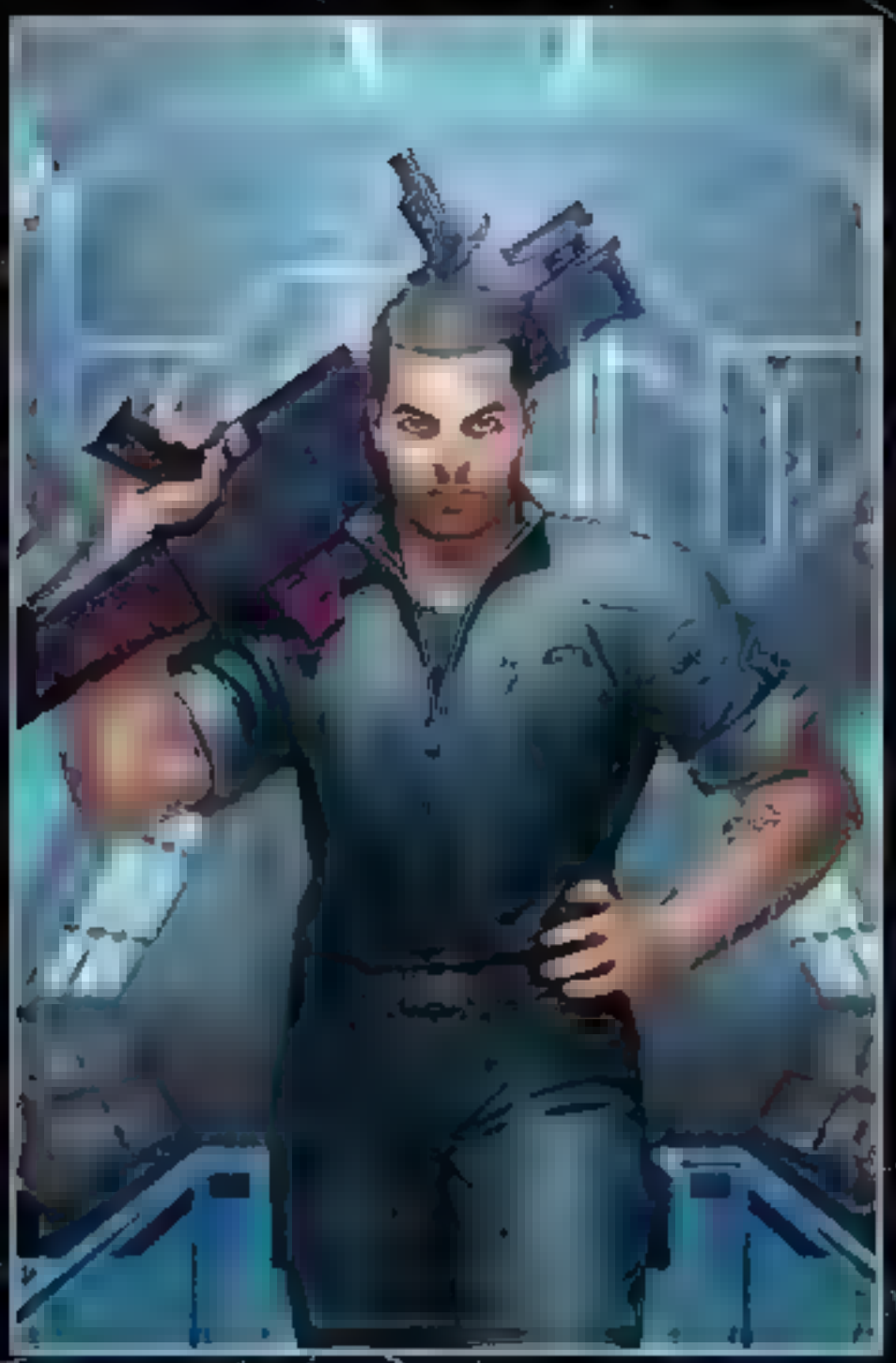
ISSUE #5 COVER BY JAMIE McKELVIE

ELIZABETH TORQUE



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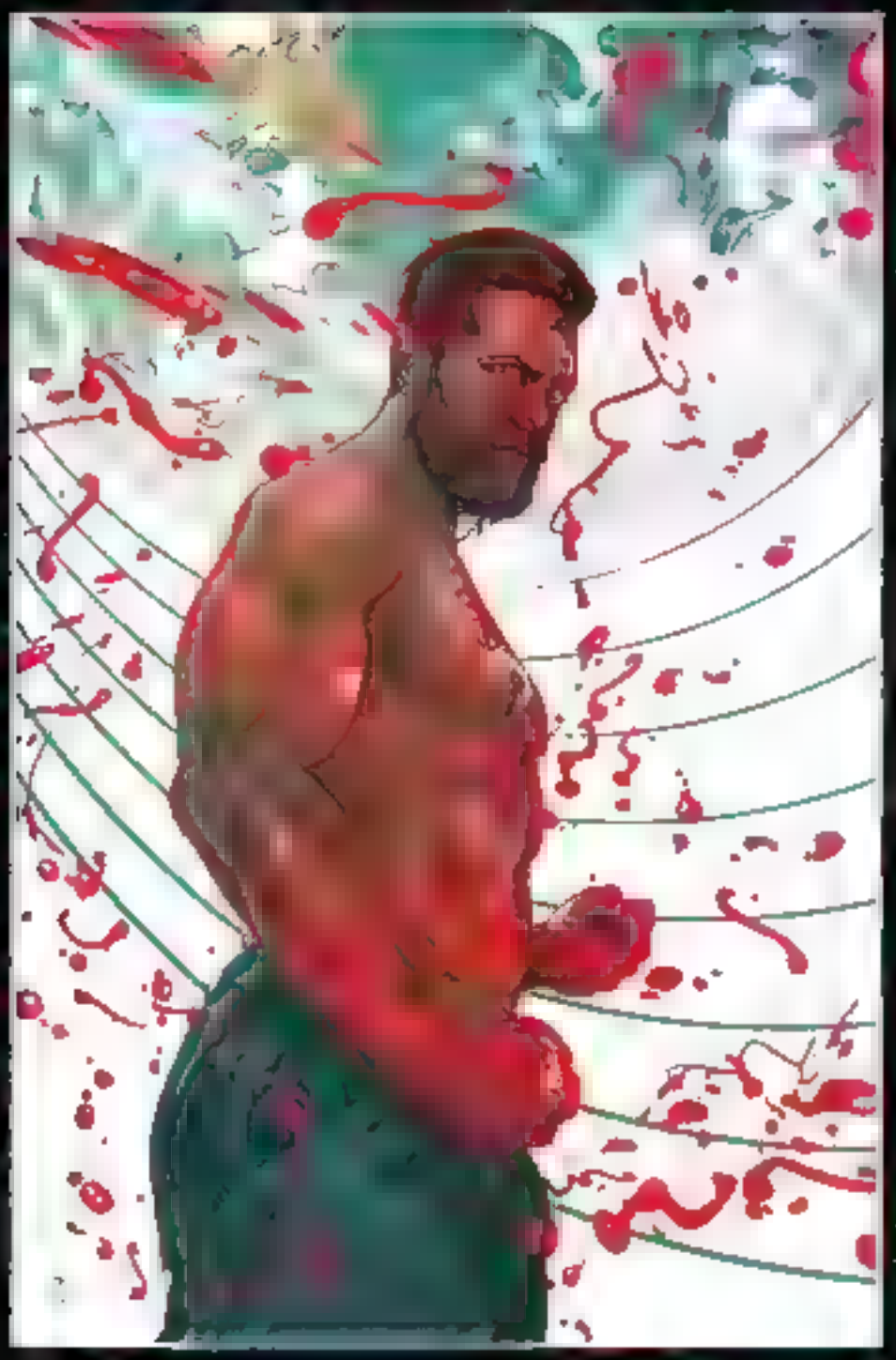

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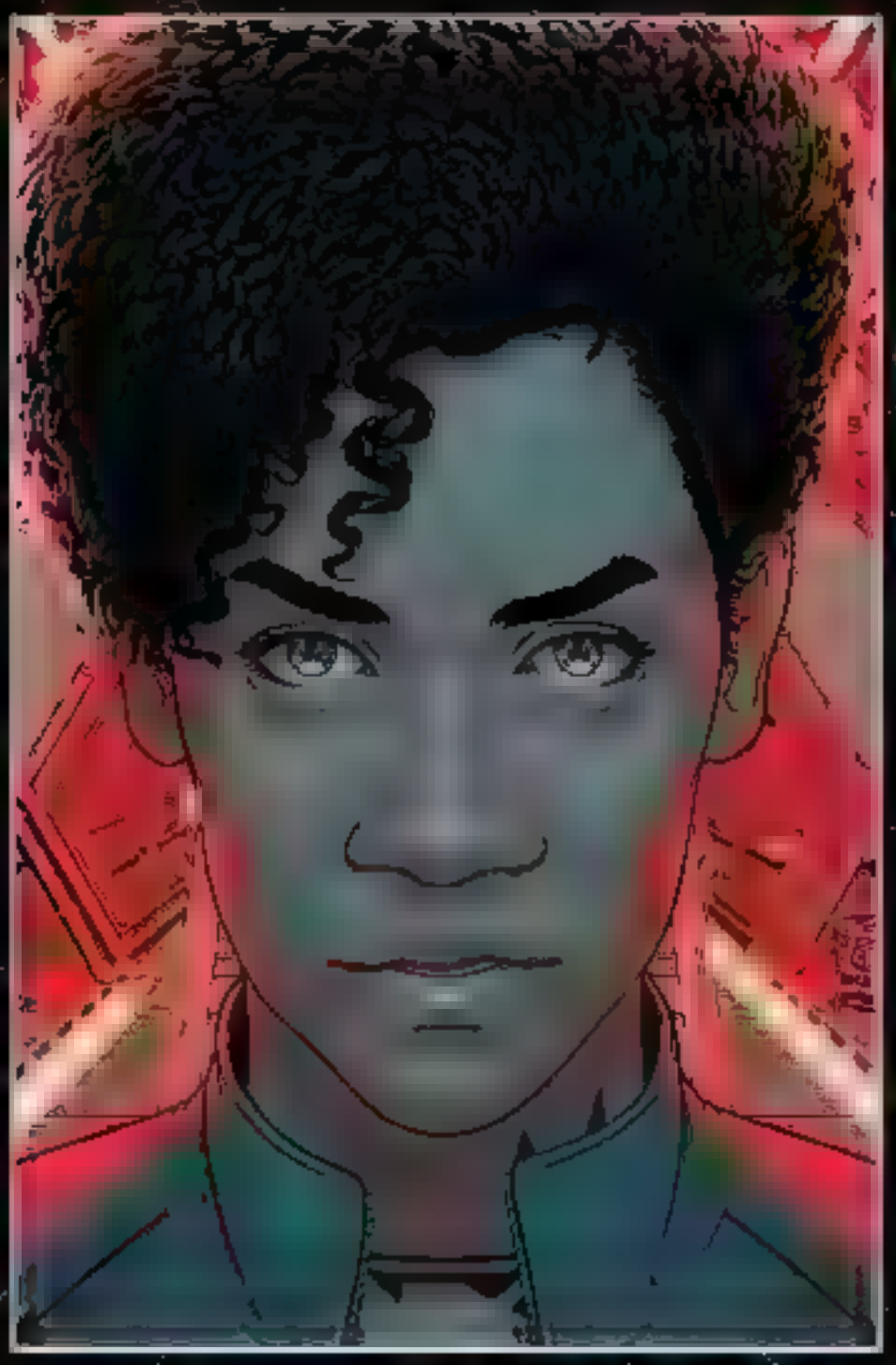

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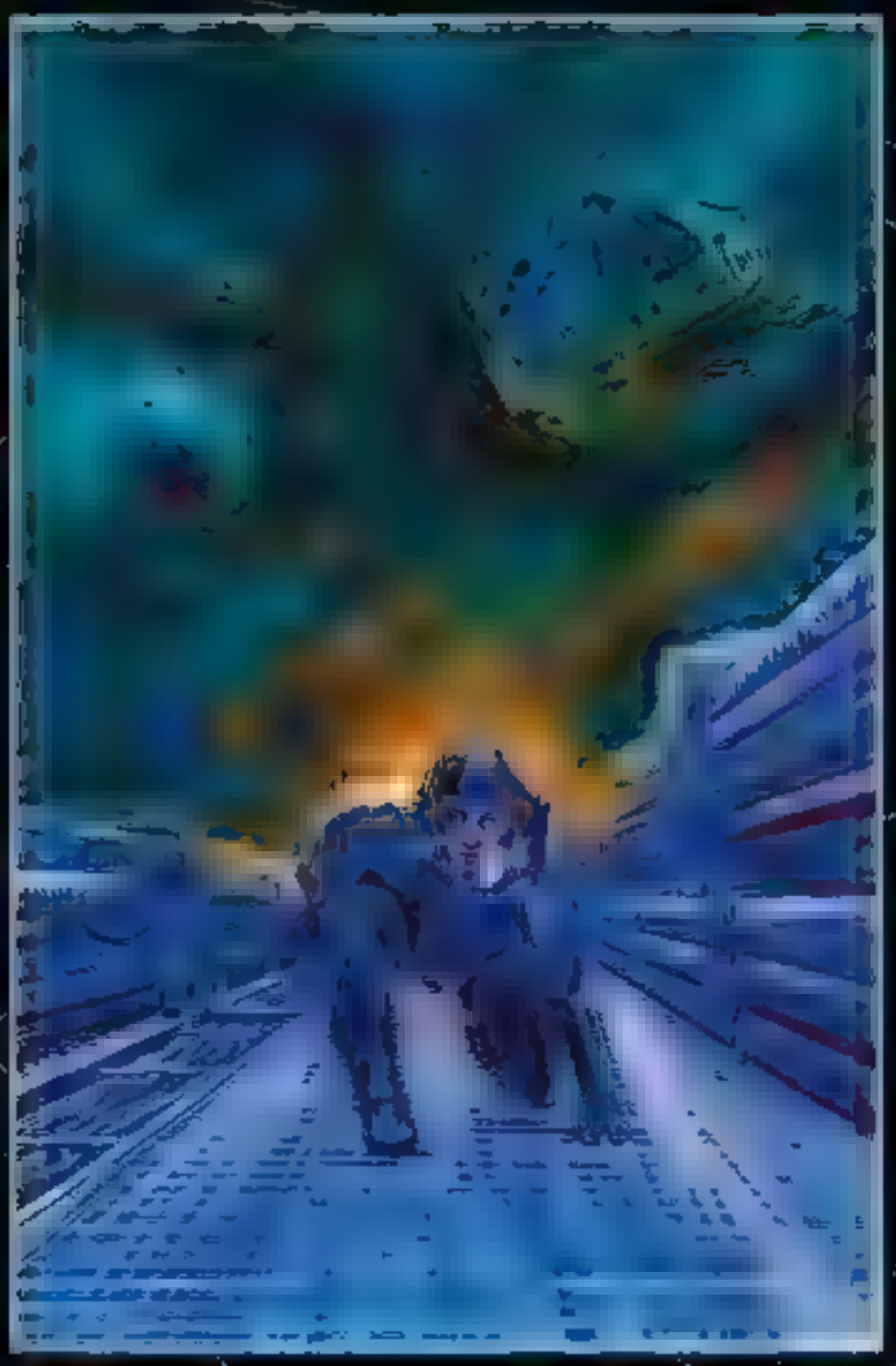

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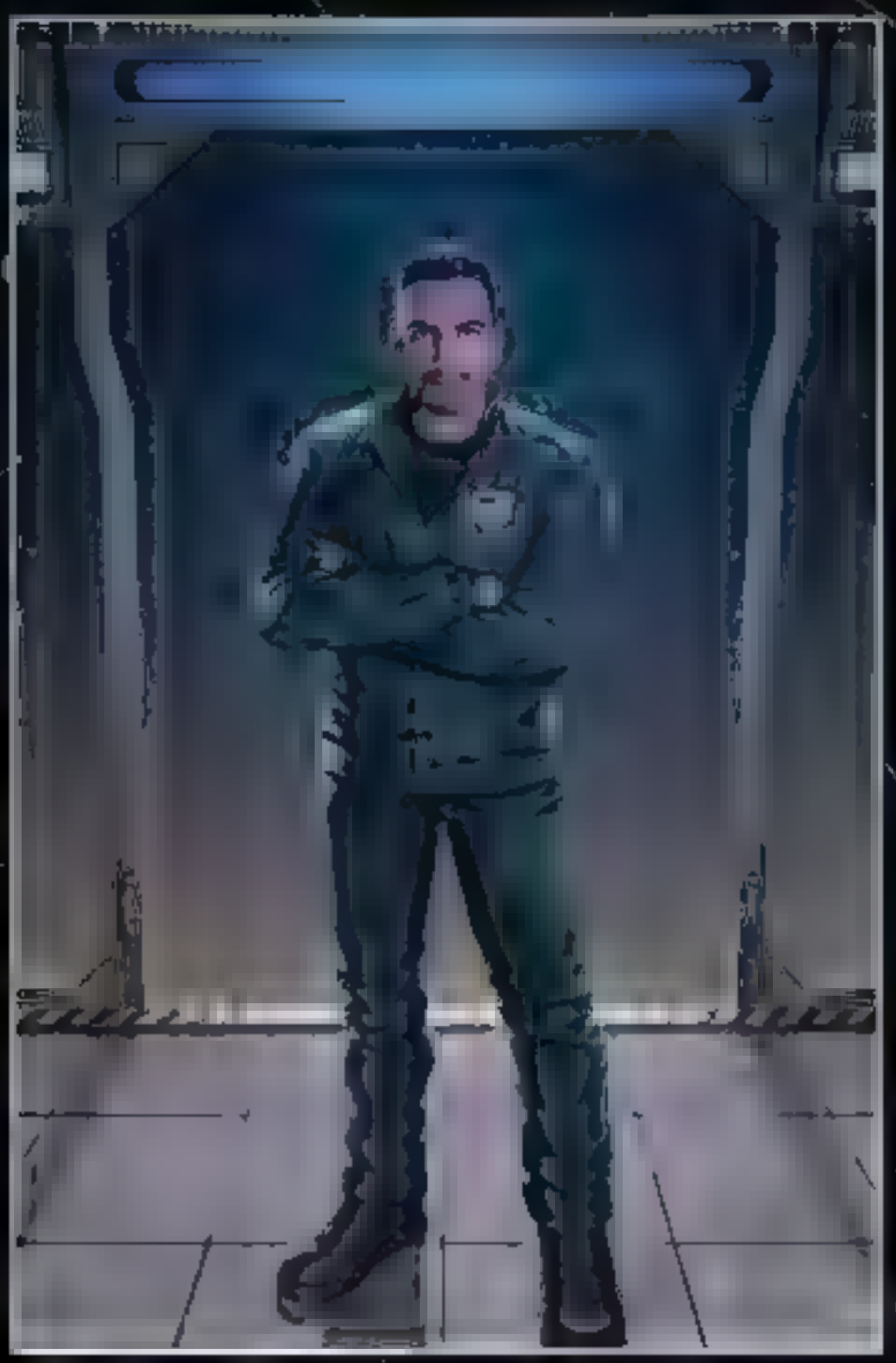

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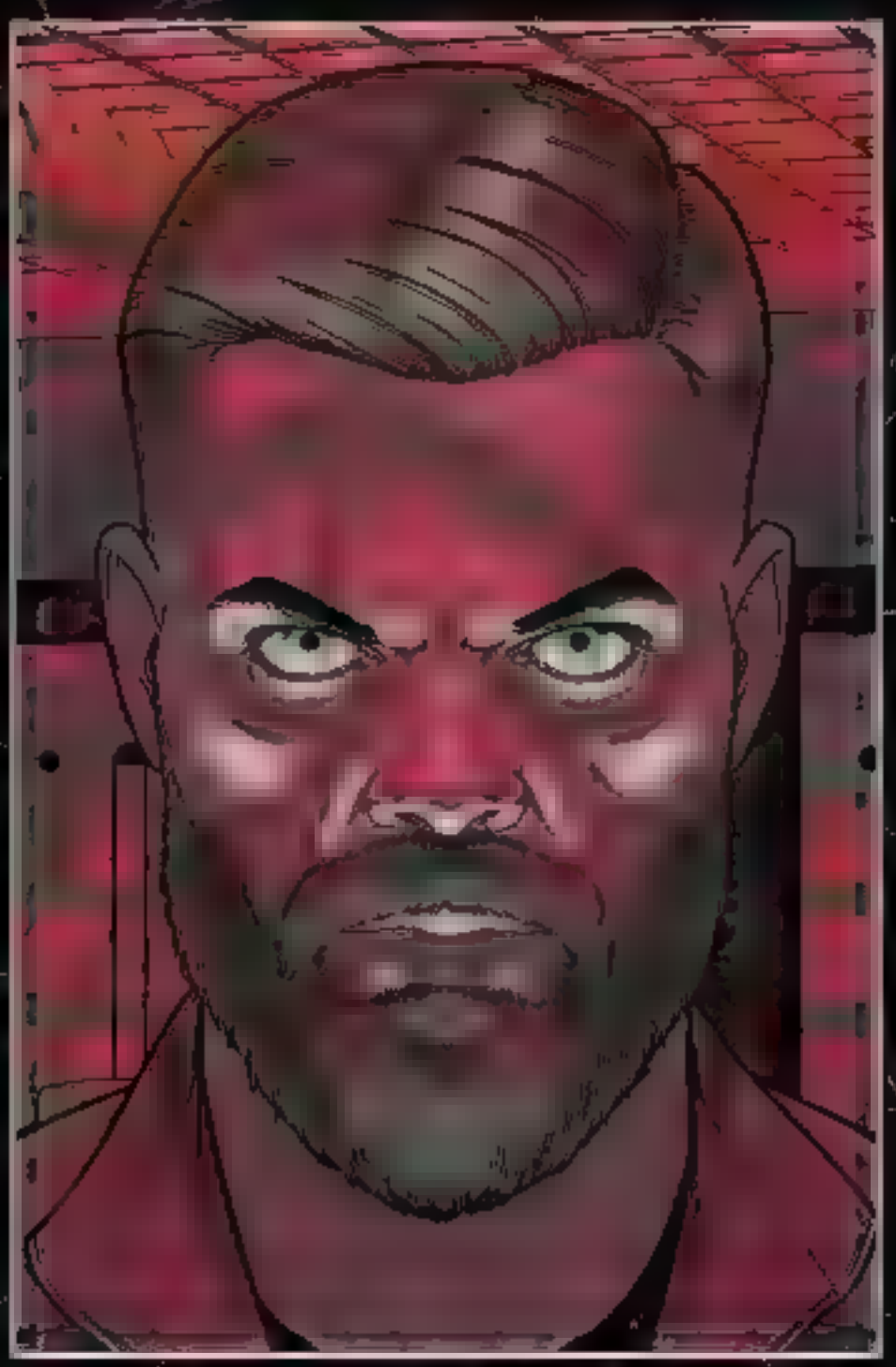

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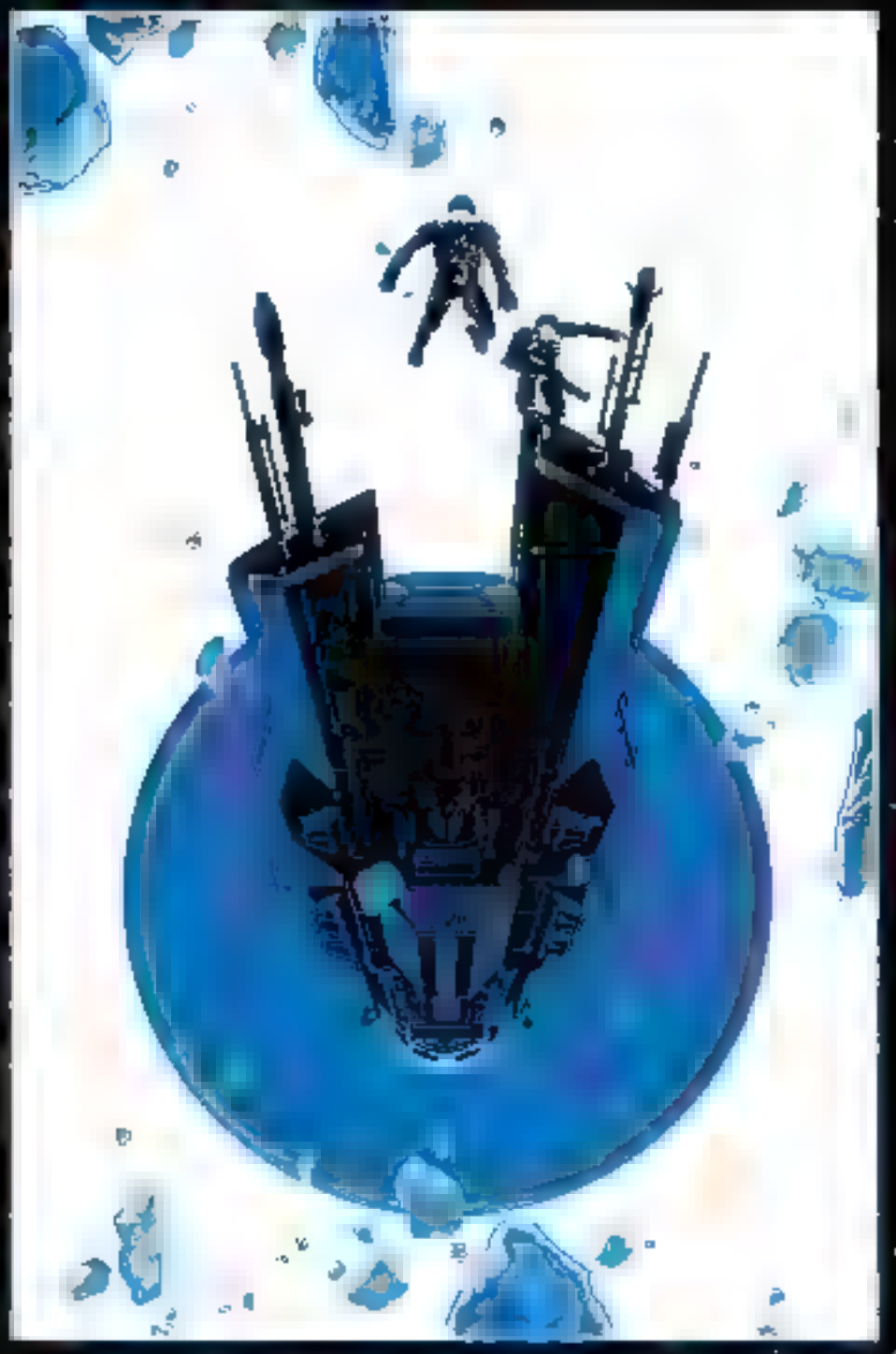

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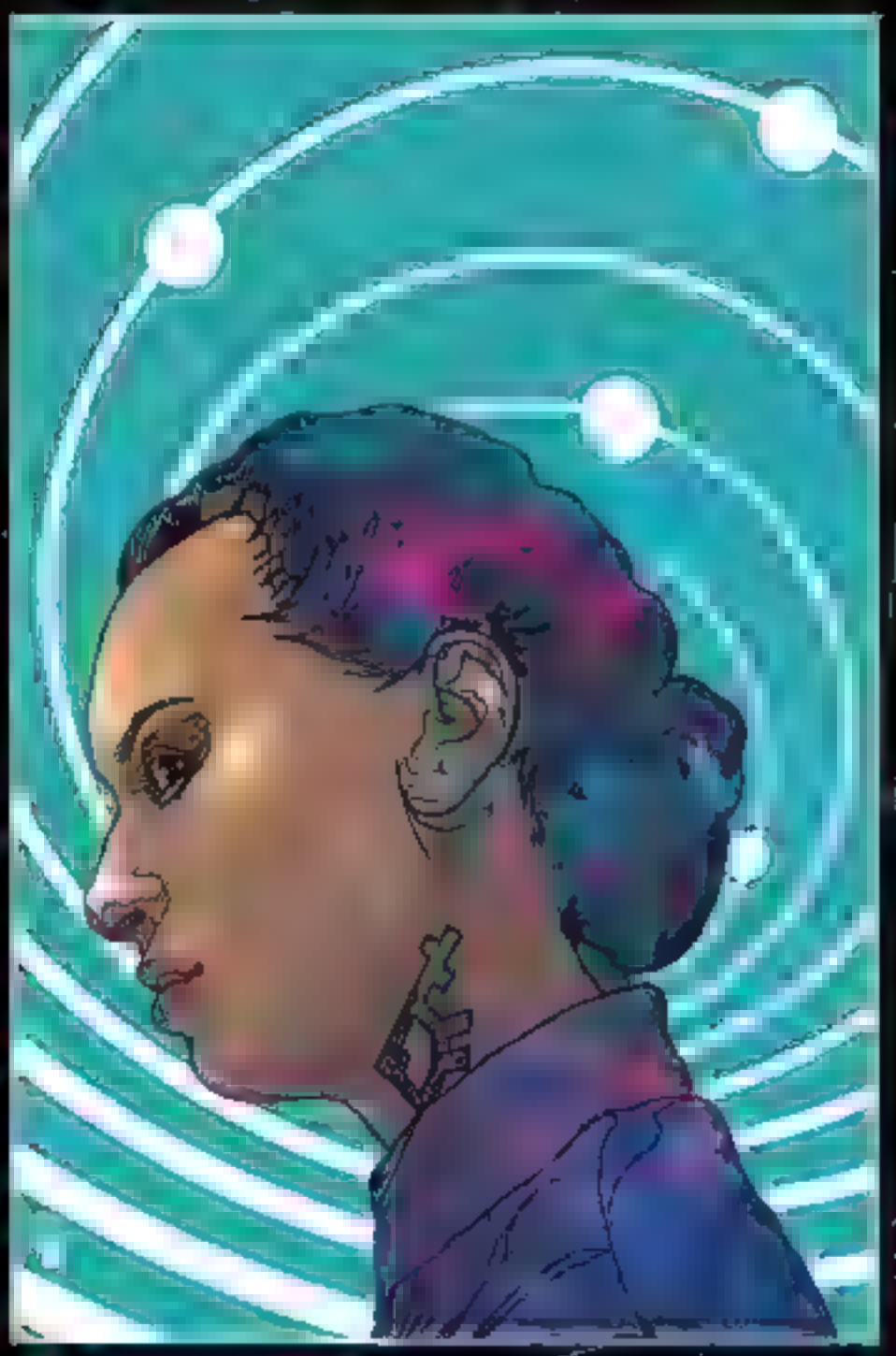

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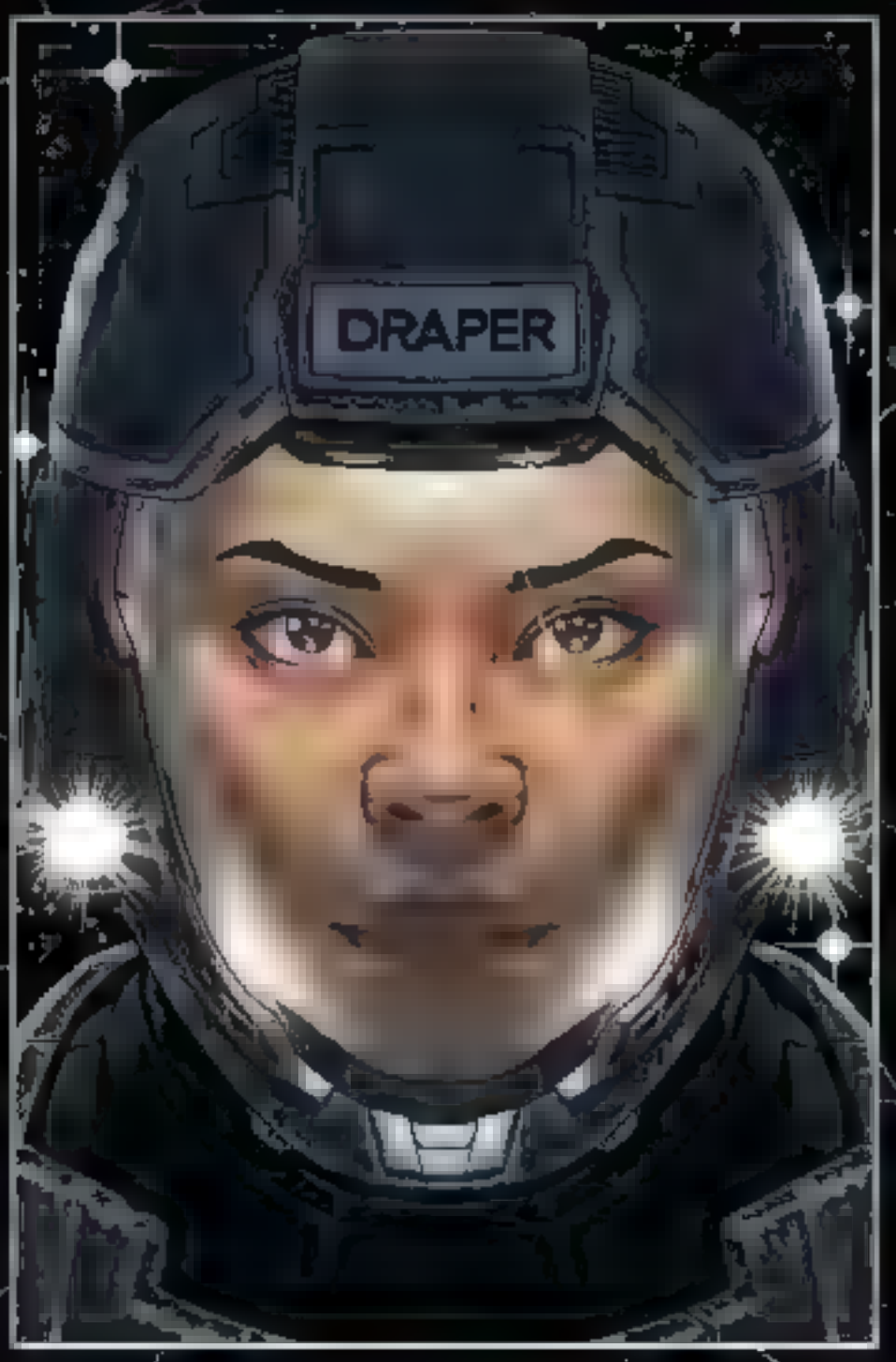

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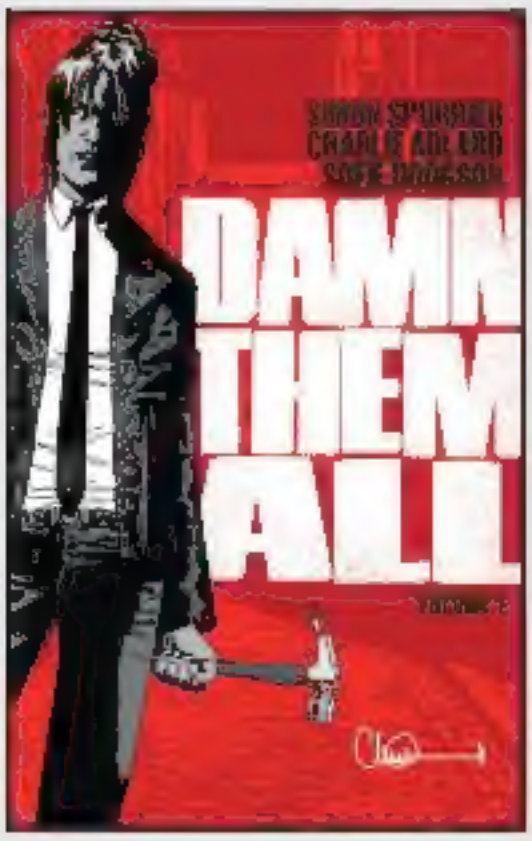

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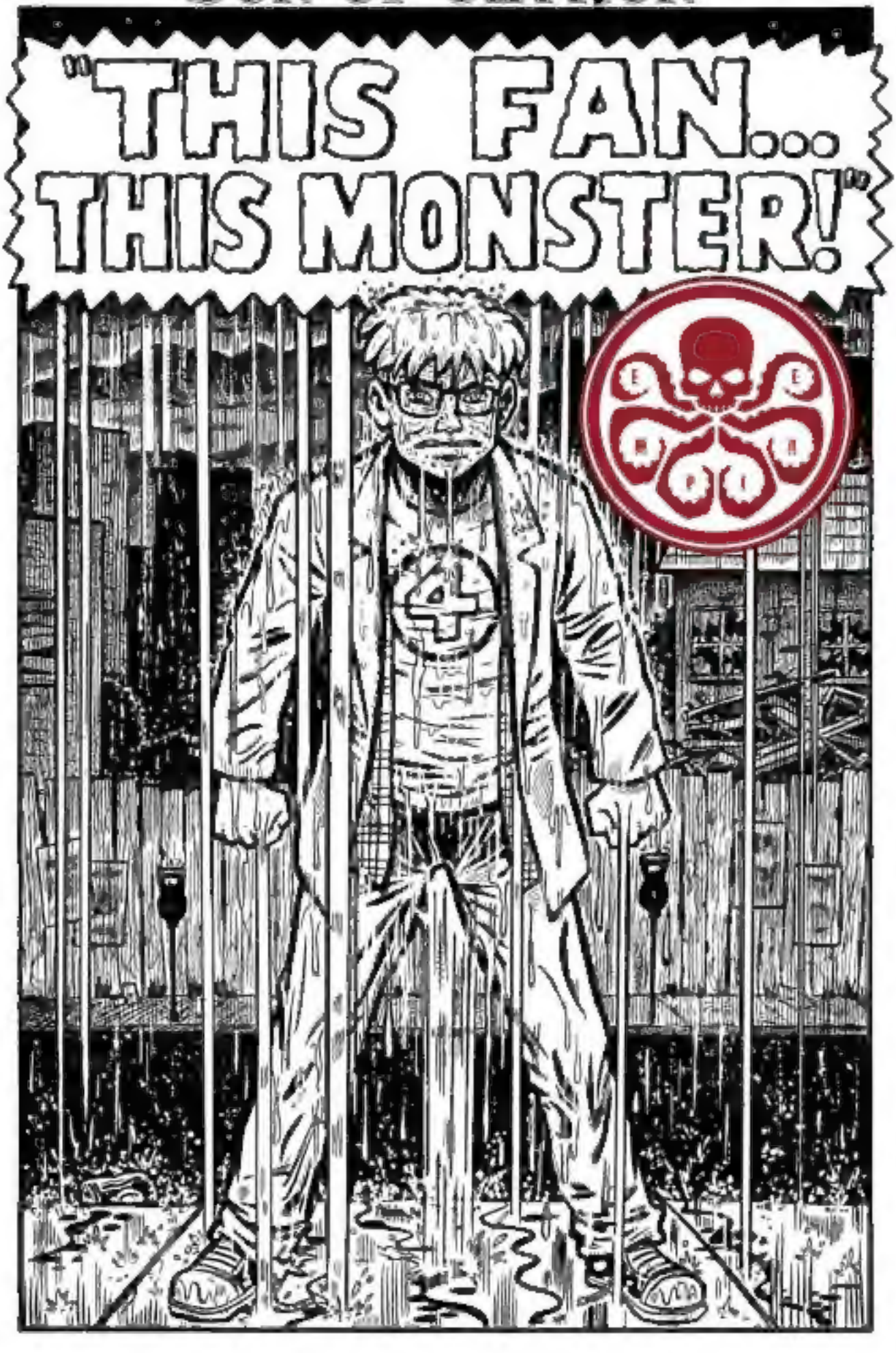
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